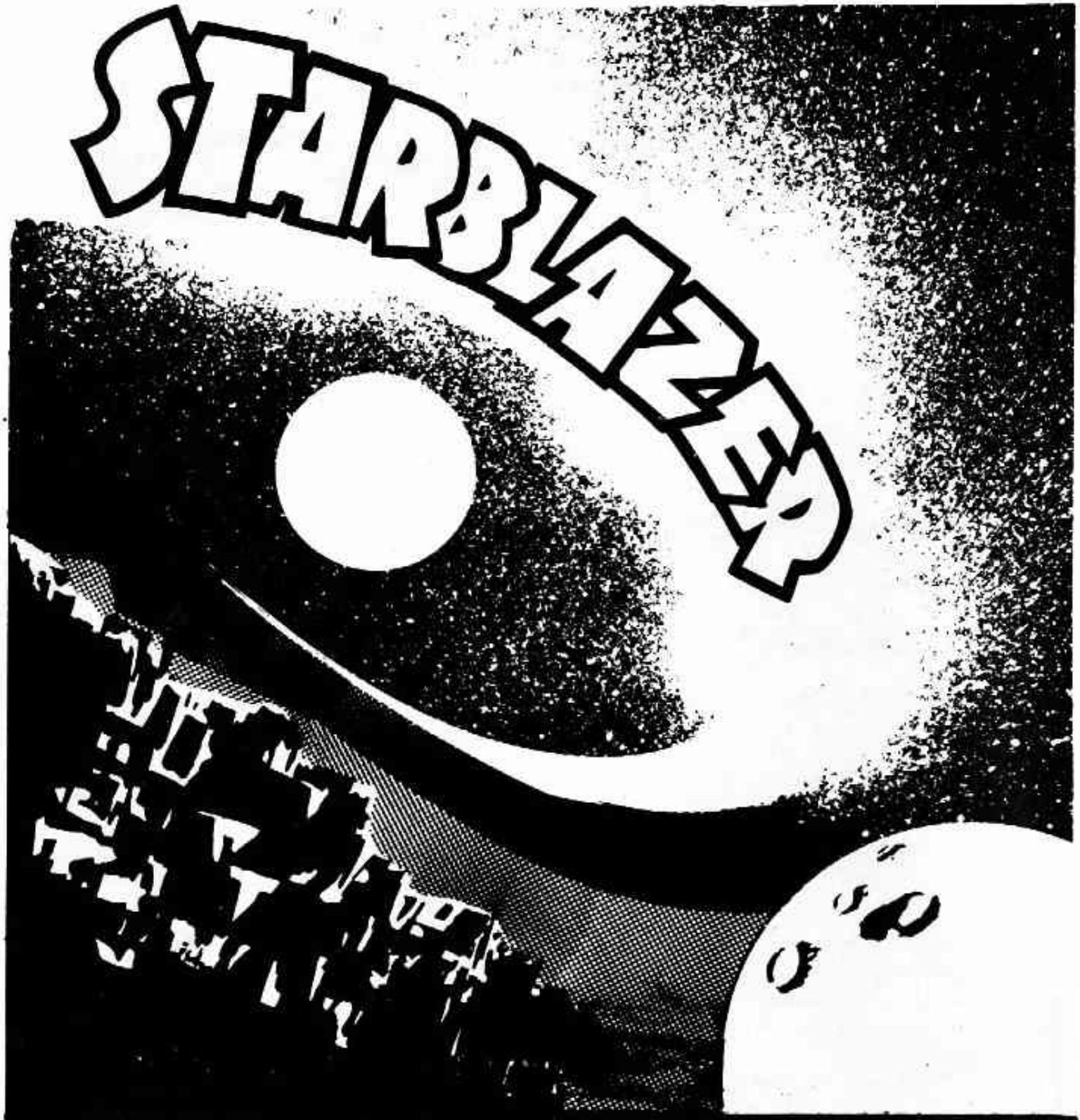
STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 78

16p

BEWARE, EARTHMEN!
TO ENTER THE MYSTERIOUS DEEP-SPACE VESSEL IS TO STEP THROUGH THE ...

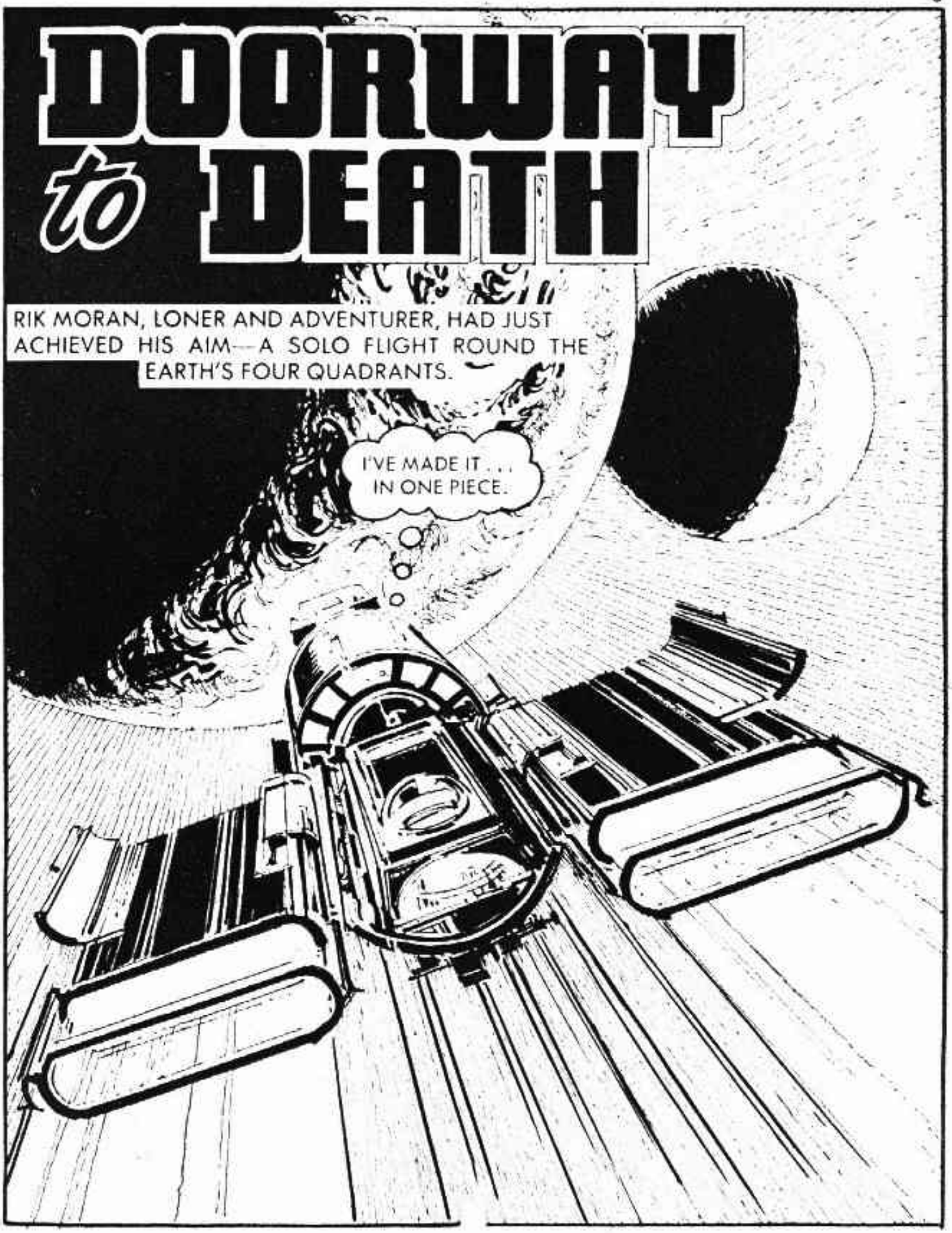
DOORWAY TO DEATH



EARTH WAS THE ONLY CIVILISED PLANET IN THE FOUR QUADRANTS REGION, AND IT WAS SAFE FROM ATTACK, AS EVEN FASTER THAN LIGHT CRAFT WOULD TAKE CENTURIES TO REACH IT FROM THE NEAREST ALIEN POWER.

BUT RESTLESS SOULS STILL DID EXIST — LIKE RIK MORAN, A PILOT WITH A BURNING AMBITION, AND ULTIMATELY A TERRIBLE RESPONSIBILITY . . .

DOORWAY to DEATH



AS RIK DESCENDED TO THE SPACEPORT—
DID HE REALLY GO ROUND THE QUADRANT IN THAT OLD CRAFT?

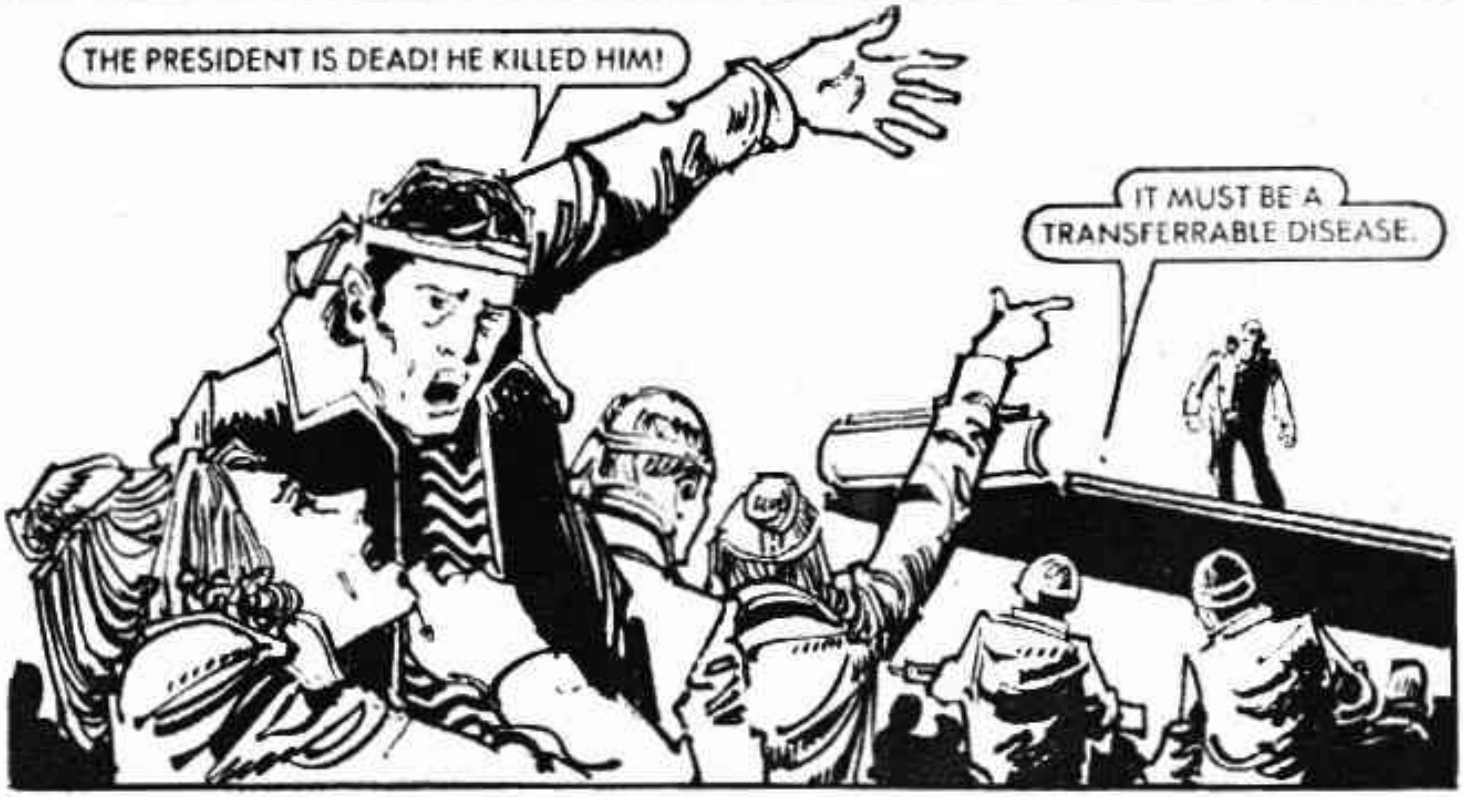
WHAT A CROWD! EVEN THE PRESIDENT IS HERE . . .

ON BEHALF OF US ALL, RIK MORAN— CONGRATULATIONS.
THANK YOU, MR PRESIDENT.

IN MILLIONS OF HOMES ALL OVER THE WORLD, CITIZENS WERE VIEWING THE HISTORIC SCENE.
YOU HAVE OPENED UP A NEW ERA IN TRAVEL. YOU HAVE PROVED THAT VAST DISTANCES CAN BE TRAVELLED SAFELY IN SMALL CRAFT.

SUDDENLY THE PRESIDENT GASPED FOR AIR
RIK! WHAT?

HOLD IT THERE!

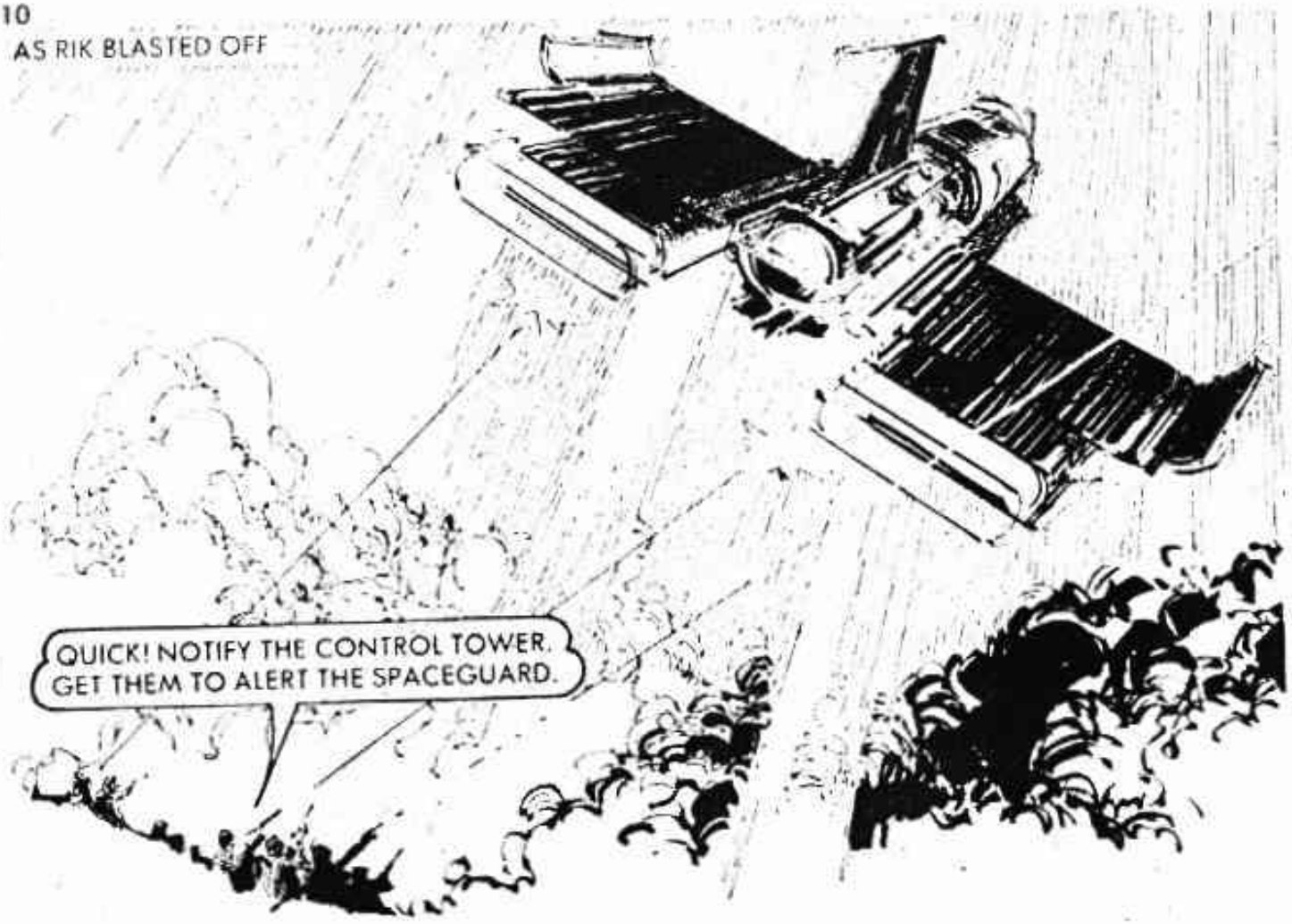

THE PRESIDENT IS DEAD! HE KILLED HIM!
IT MUST BE A TRANSFERRABLE DISEASE.

WHAT'S GOING ON? THAT MAN ON THAT HOVER-TRUCK . . .
HE'S GOT A LONG DISTANCE PHASER!
STAY WHERE YOU ARE!
WAIT! LOOK . . . WHAT'S THE USE!
EVEN AS RIK PROTESTED, THE ASSASSIN BLASTED OFF—

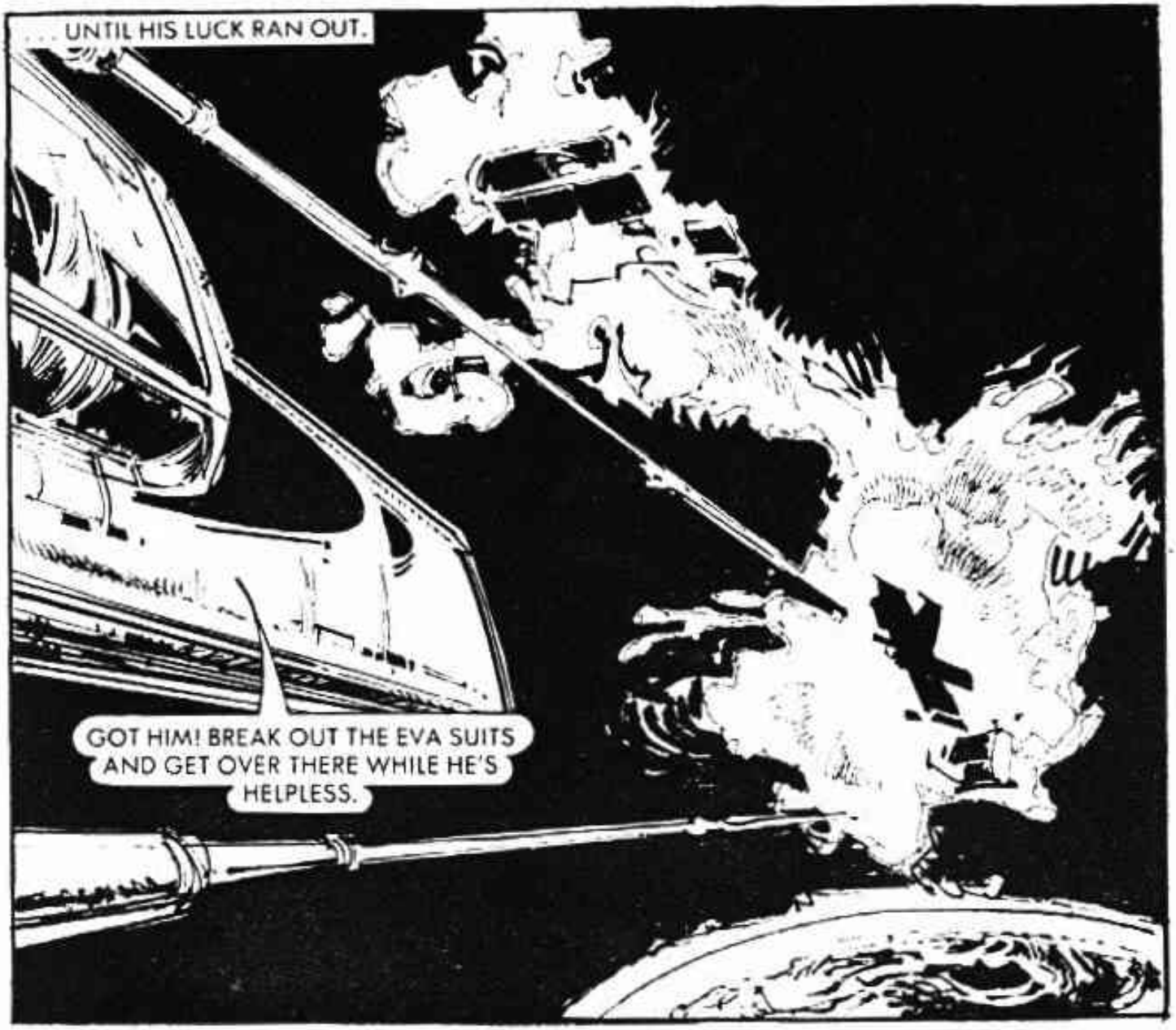
I'LL HAVE TO TRY AND MAKE A RUN FOR IT.
STOP HIM!

MADE IT! NOW TO ENERGISE THE METEOR SHIELD. THAT SHOULD DEFLECT THEIR FIRE. THEN I'D BETTER BLAST OUT OF HERE AND FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON.

AS RIK BLASTED OFF



RIK MANAGED TO AVOID MOST OF THE FIRE . . .


. . . UNTIL HIS LUCK RAN OUT.
GOT HIM! BREAK OUT THE EVA SUITS AND GET OVER THERE WHILE HE'S HELPLESS.

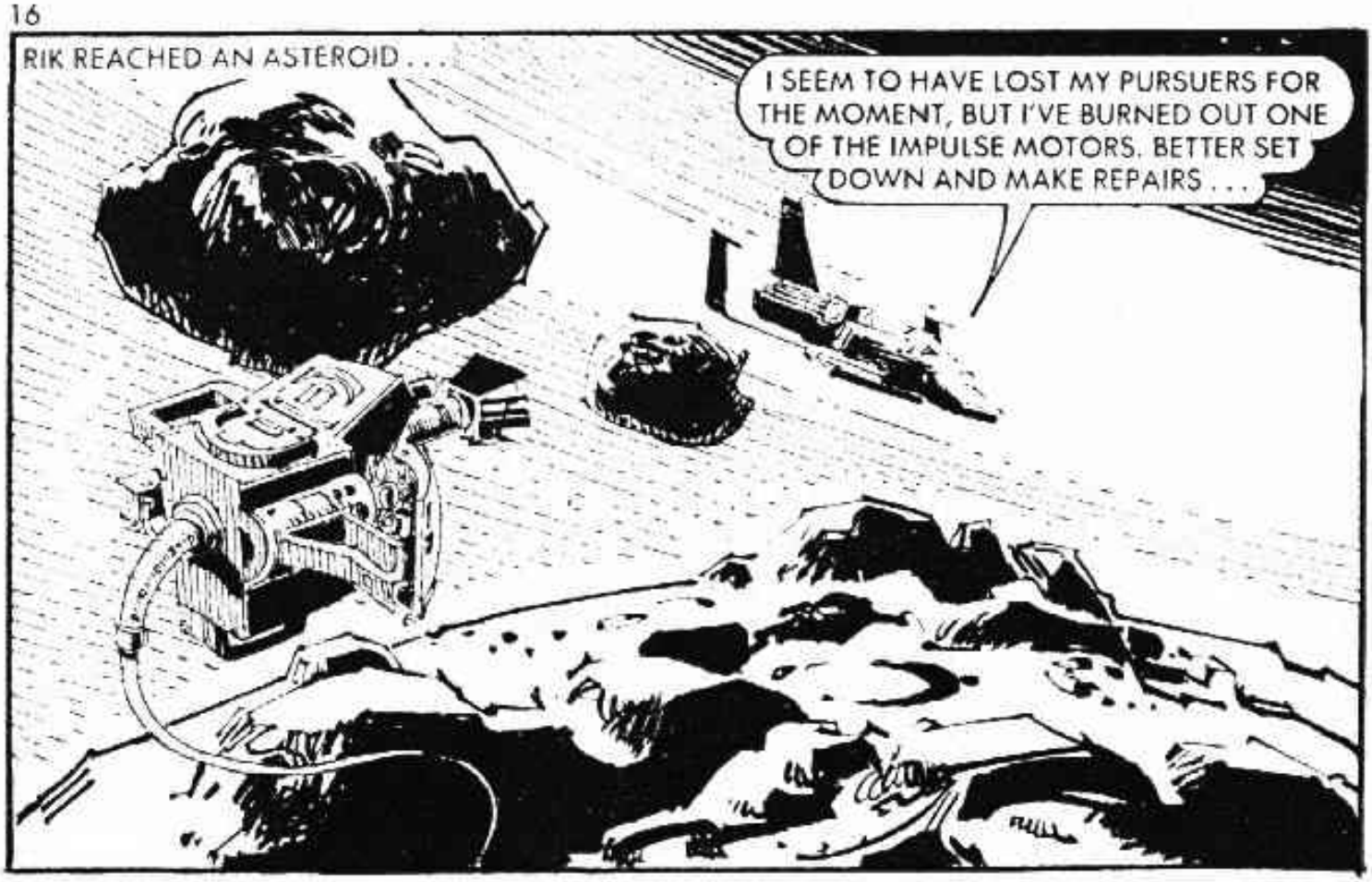
CAUTIOUSLY THEY APPROACHED THE STRICKEN CRAFT—
LASERS ARMED . . . STUN HIM. DON'T GIVE HIM A CHANCE.
RIGHT . . . OPEN.
THE HATCH OPENED AND RIK SHOT OUT—

WITHIN SECONDS RIK WAS ABOARD THE SECURISHIP.
HE ENCOUNTERED NO RESISTANCE FROM THE REMAINING CREWMAN.
NO! STAY AWAY!
I'LL GIVE YOU TEN SECONDS TO BE IN A SUIT AND OFF THIS SHIP!

RIK BLASTED OUT OF EARTH ORBIT.
I'VE GOT A HEAD START ON THEM, BUT THIS SHIP WASN'T DESIGNED FOR DEEP SPACE.

RIK ACTIVATED THE SHIP'S COM-LINK WITH THE SPACEPORT'S SPACE-FLIGHT INFO BANKS . . .

. . . AND SOON HE HAD THE INFORMATION HE REQUIRED.
THE SHIP IN QUESTION DEPARTED FROM EARTH 2.7 UNITS AGO, DENEB IV.
I DOUBT THAT THE ASSASSIN'S CRAFT CAN TRAVEL THAT FAR. COMPUTER, LIST ALL INTERMEDIATE PORTS ALONG THAT PROJECTED ROUTE.
ACCORDING TO NAVBANK CHARTS THERE IS ONLY ONE POSSIBLE STOP-OVER POINT . . . COLONY KNOWN AS TIN CITY.
TIN CITY? THAT'S A SPACE VESSEL WHICH HAS BECOME A HANGOUT FOR THE DREGS OF SPACE.

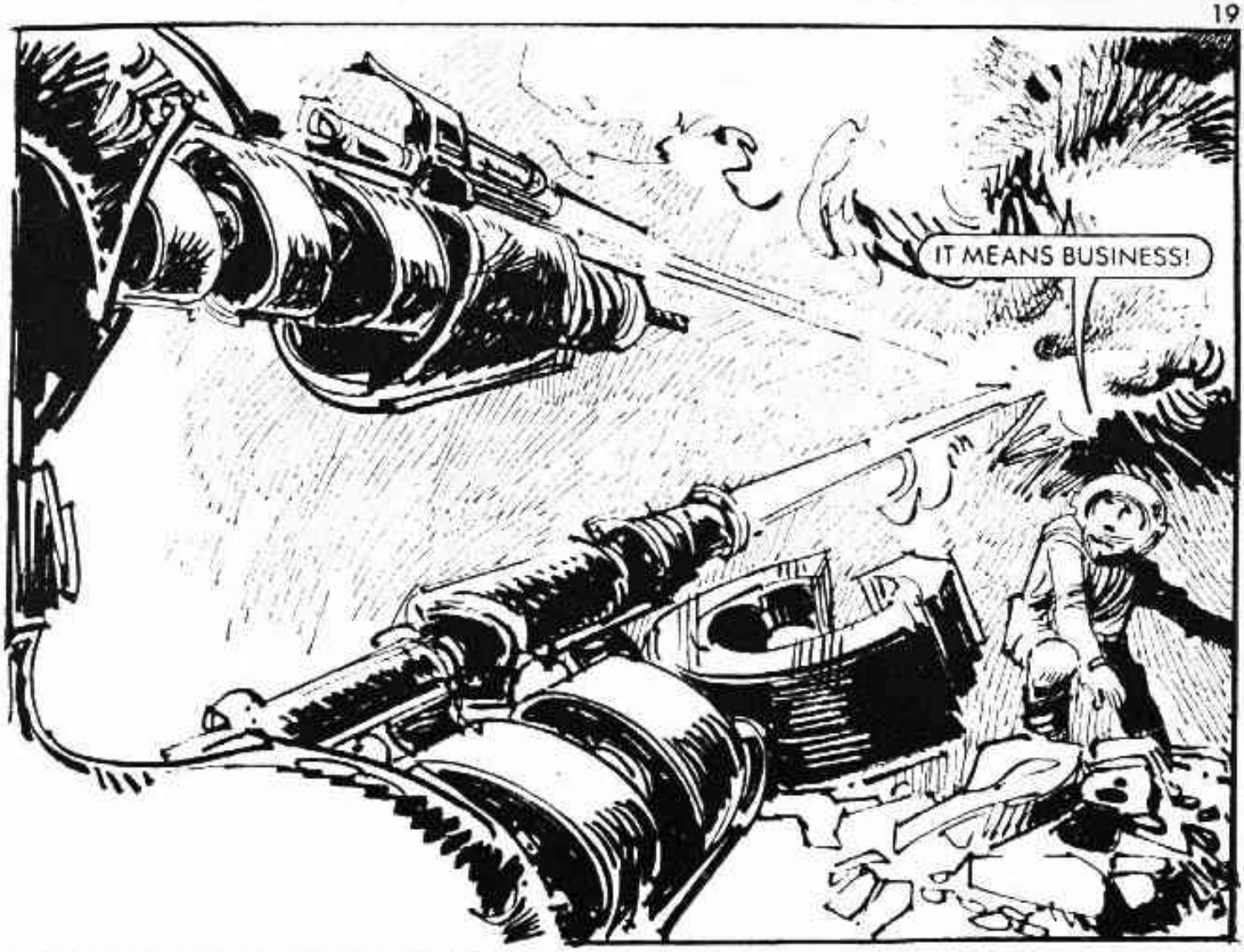


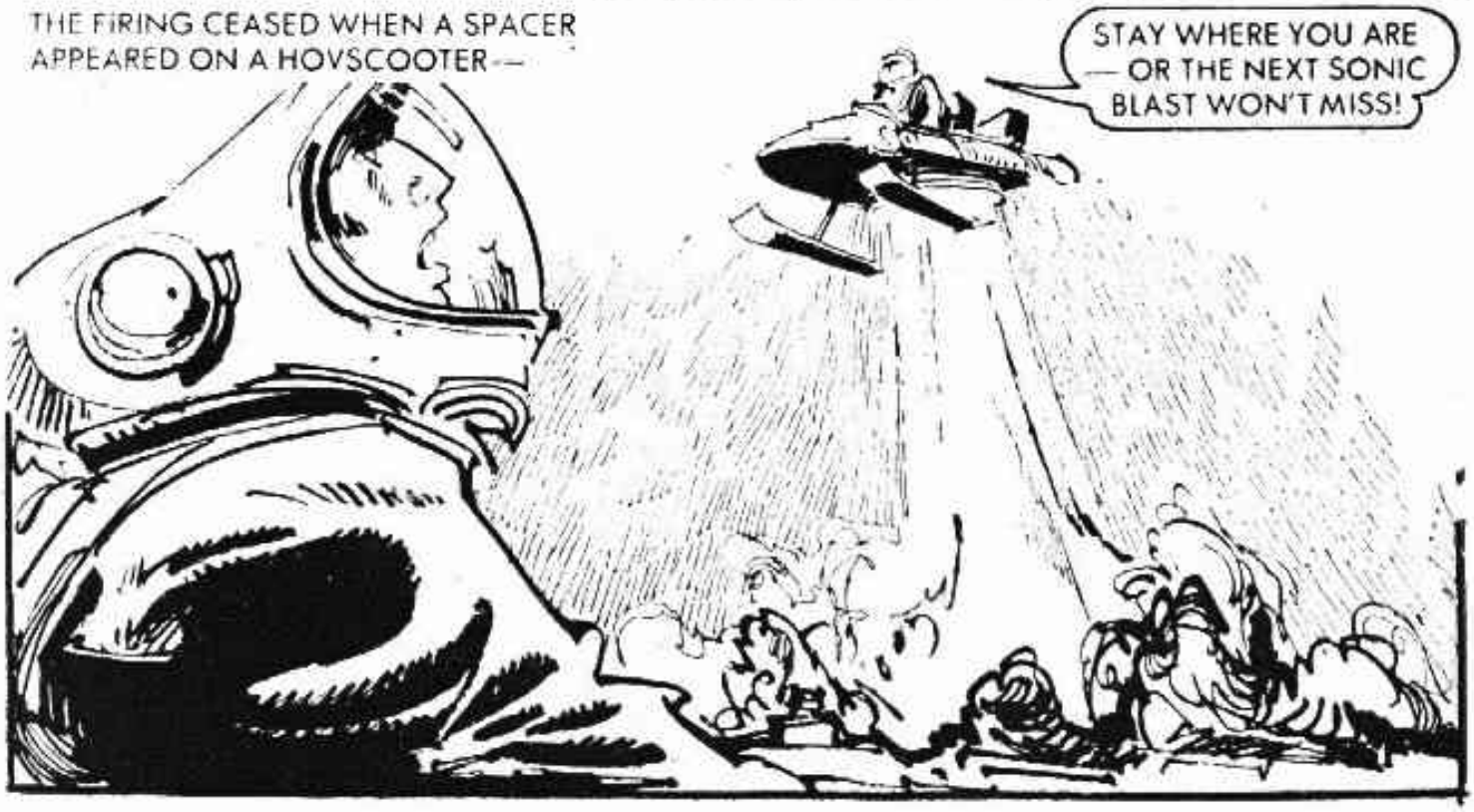
TOTALLY UNAWARE HE WAS BEING WATCHED, RIK STEPPED OUT.

MY MONITORS REGISTER MOVEMENT . . . WHAT IS IT?

GREAT STARS!

A MINING ROBOT!

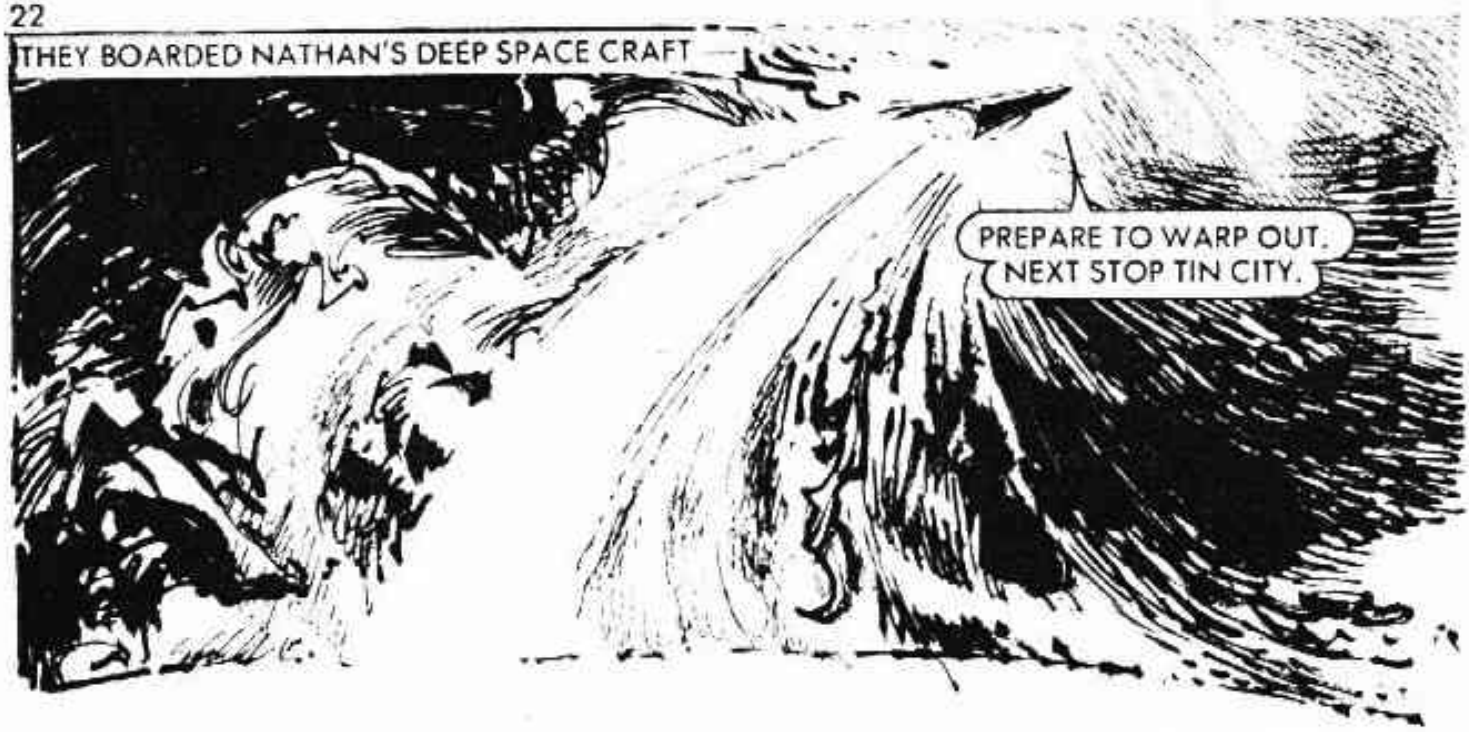

IT MEANS BUSINESS!

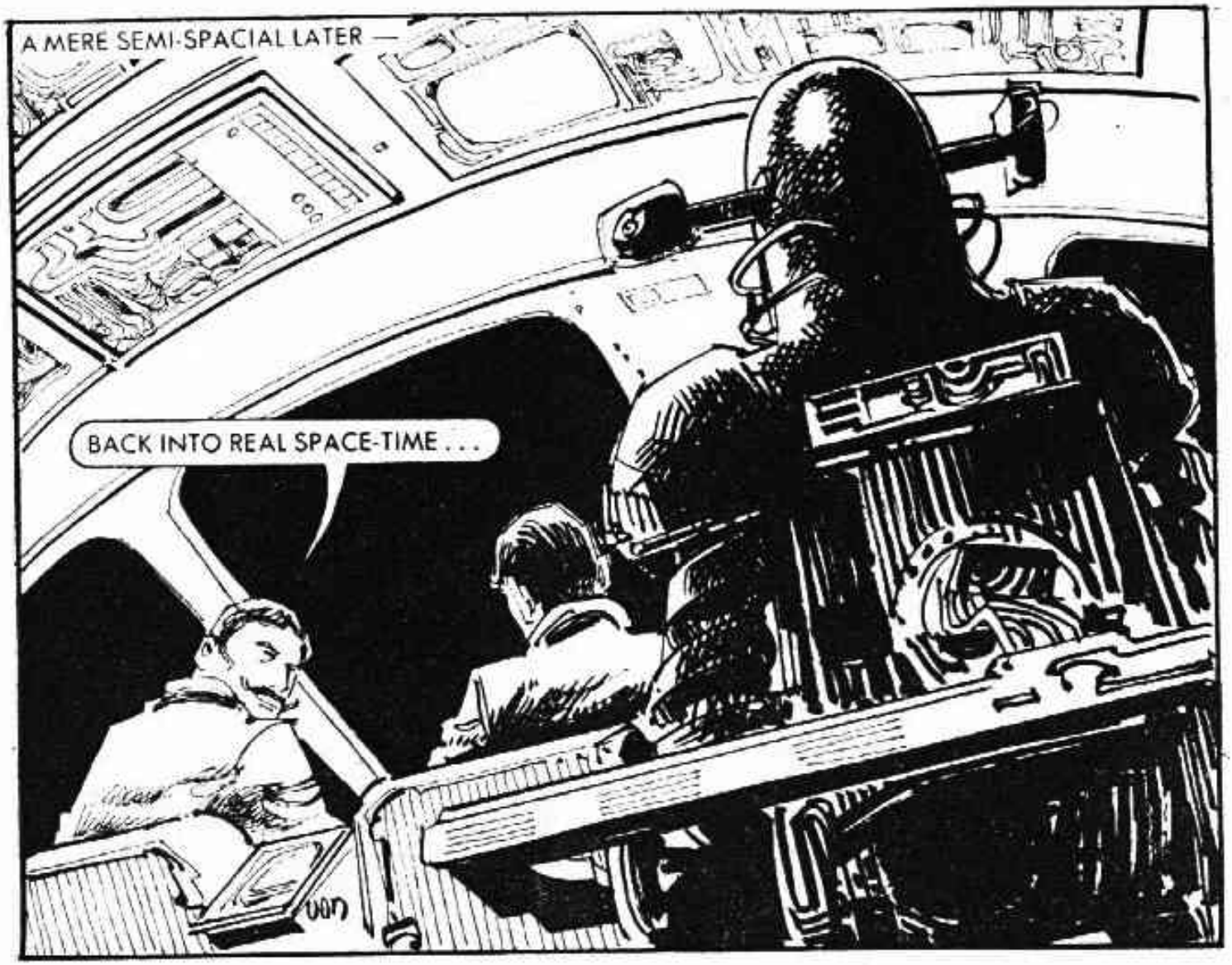

THE FIRING CEASED WHEN A SPACER APPEARED ON A HOVSCOOTER—
STAY WHERE YOU ARE — OR THE NEXT SONIC BLAST WON'T MISS!

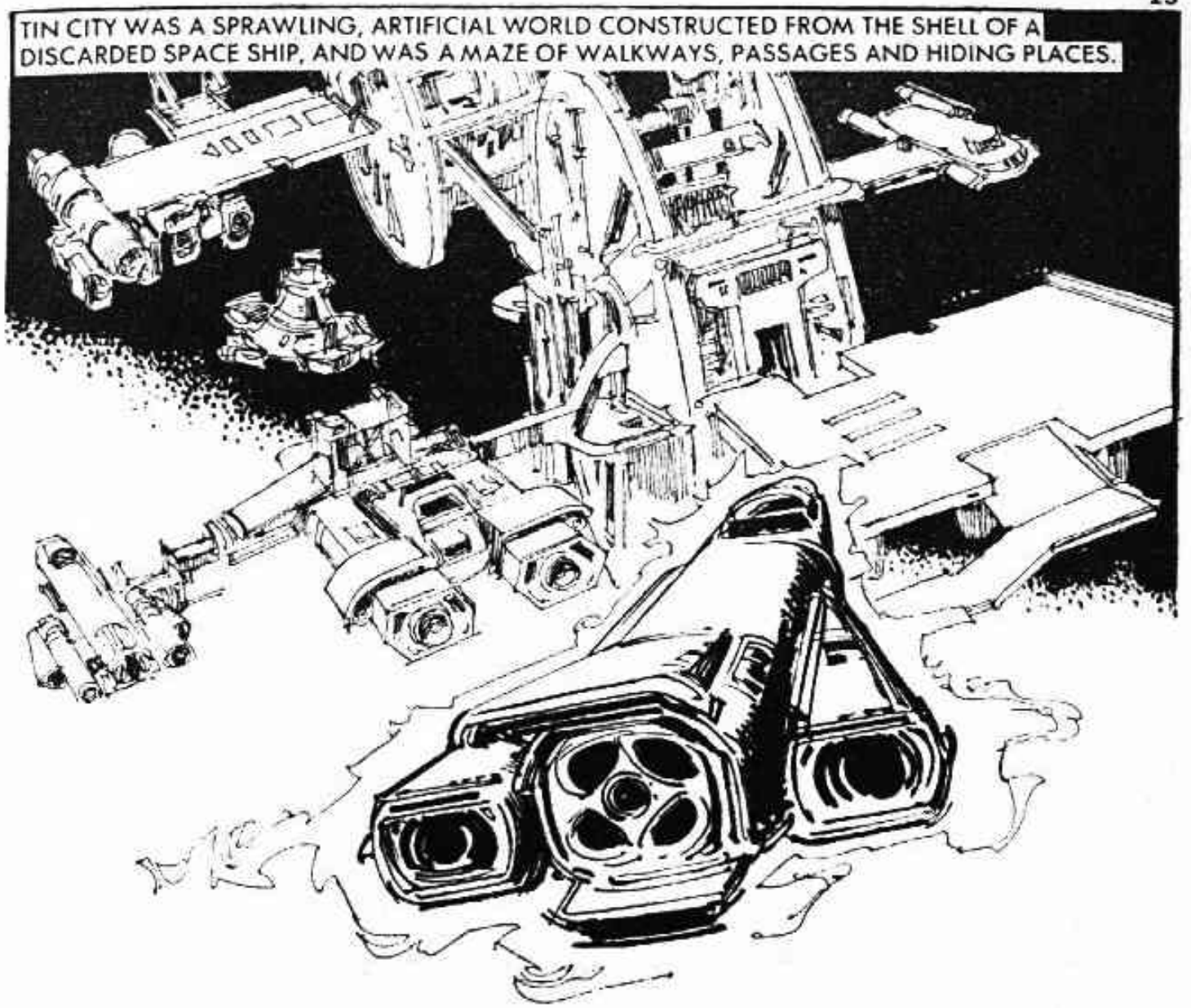
RIK DETAILED THE STRING OF EVENTS TO HIS FELLOW PILOT FROM THE GALACTIC WAR.

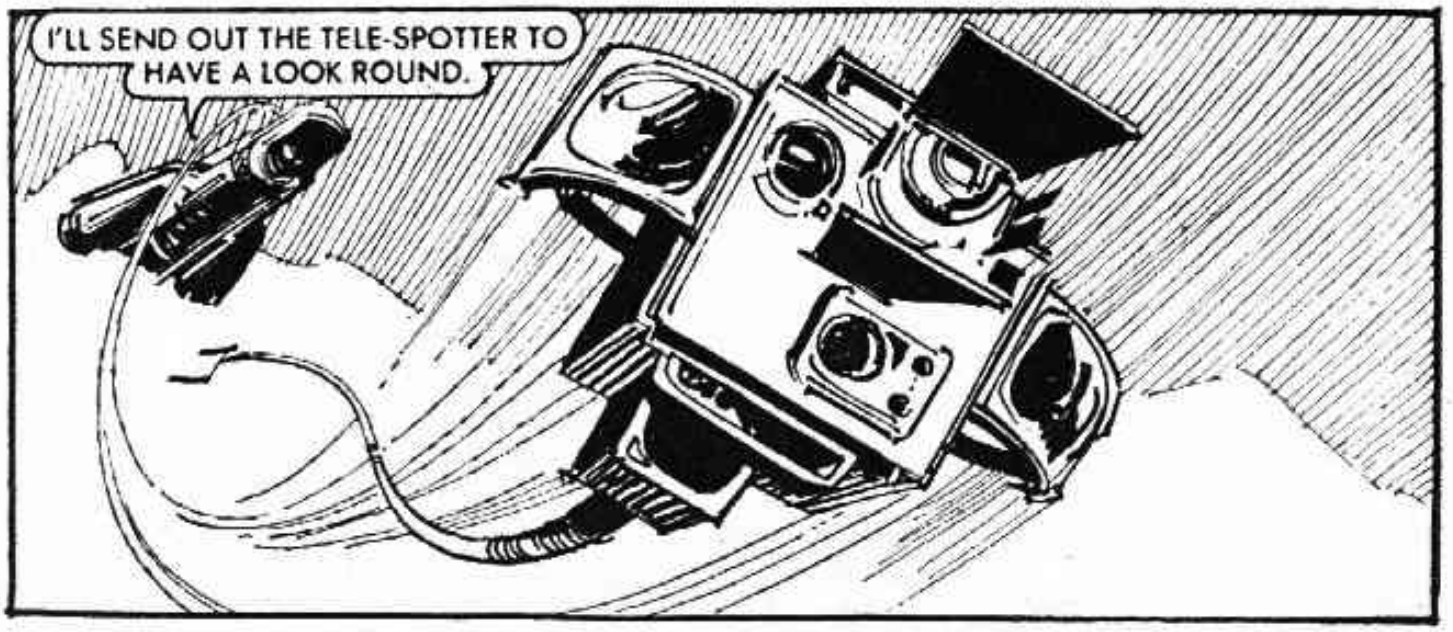
AFTER A WHILE –
IT SOUNDS AS THOUGH WE'RE GOING TO HAVE OUR HANDS FULL UNRAVELLING THIS MYSTERY . . .
WE?

YOU DON'T THINK I'LL LET YOU GO INTO THIS ALONE, DO YOU?


THEY BOARDED NATHAN'S DEEP SPACE CRAFT —
PREPARE TO WARP OUT. NEXT STOP TIN CITY.


A MERE SEMI-SPACIAL LATER —
BACK INTO REAL SPACE-TIME . . .


TIN CITY WAS A SPRAWLING, ARTIFICIAL WORLD CONSTRUCTED FROM THE SHELL OF A DISCARDED SPACE SHIP, AND WAS A MAZE OF WALKWAYS, PASSAGES AND HIDING PLACES.

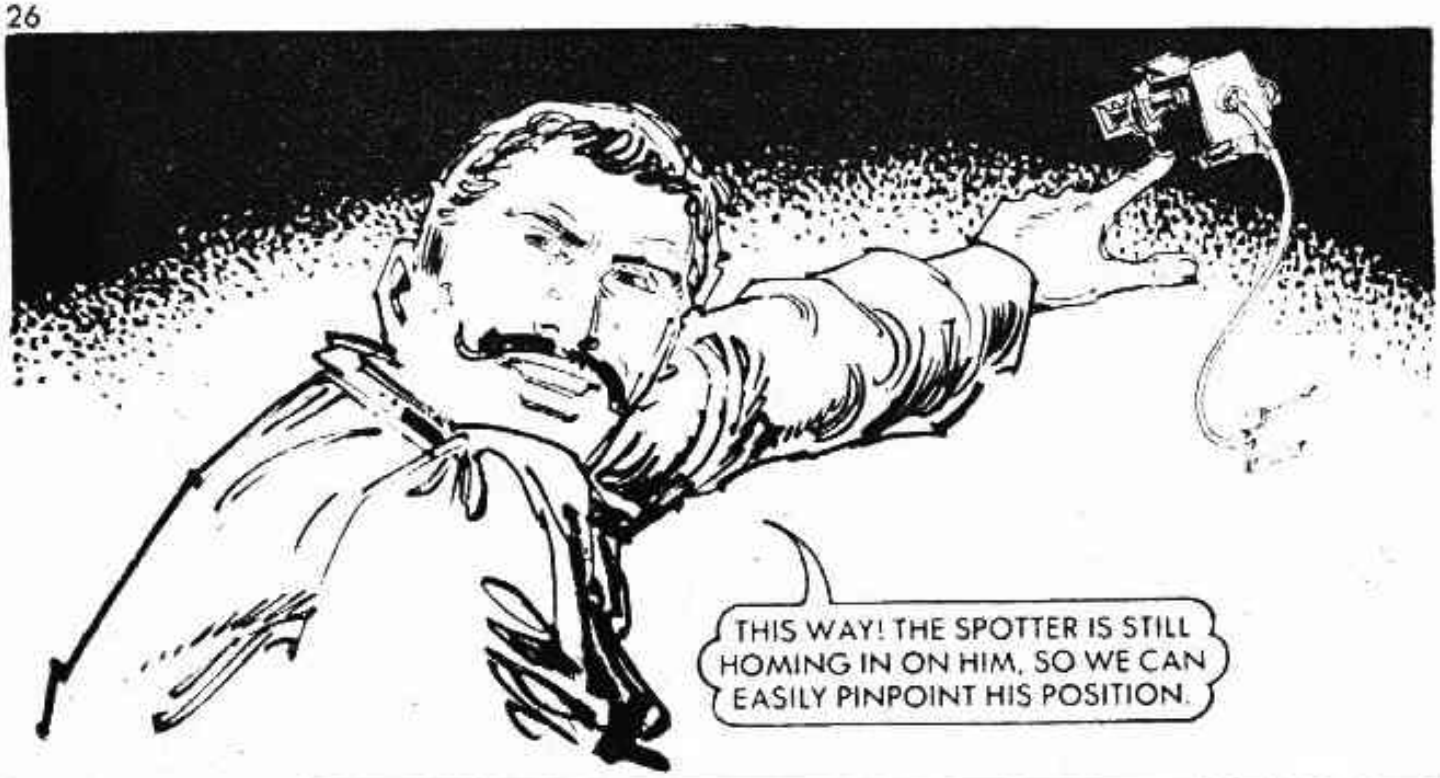

I'LL SEND OUT THE TELE-SPOTTER TO HAVE A LOOK ROUND.

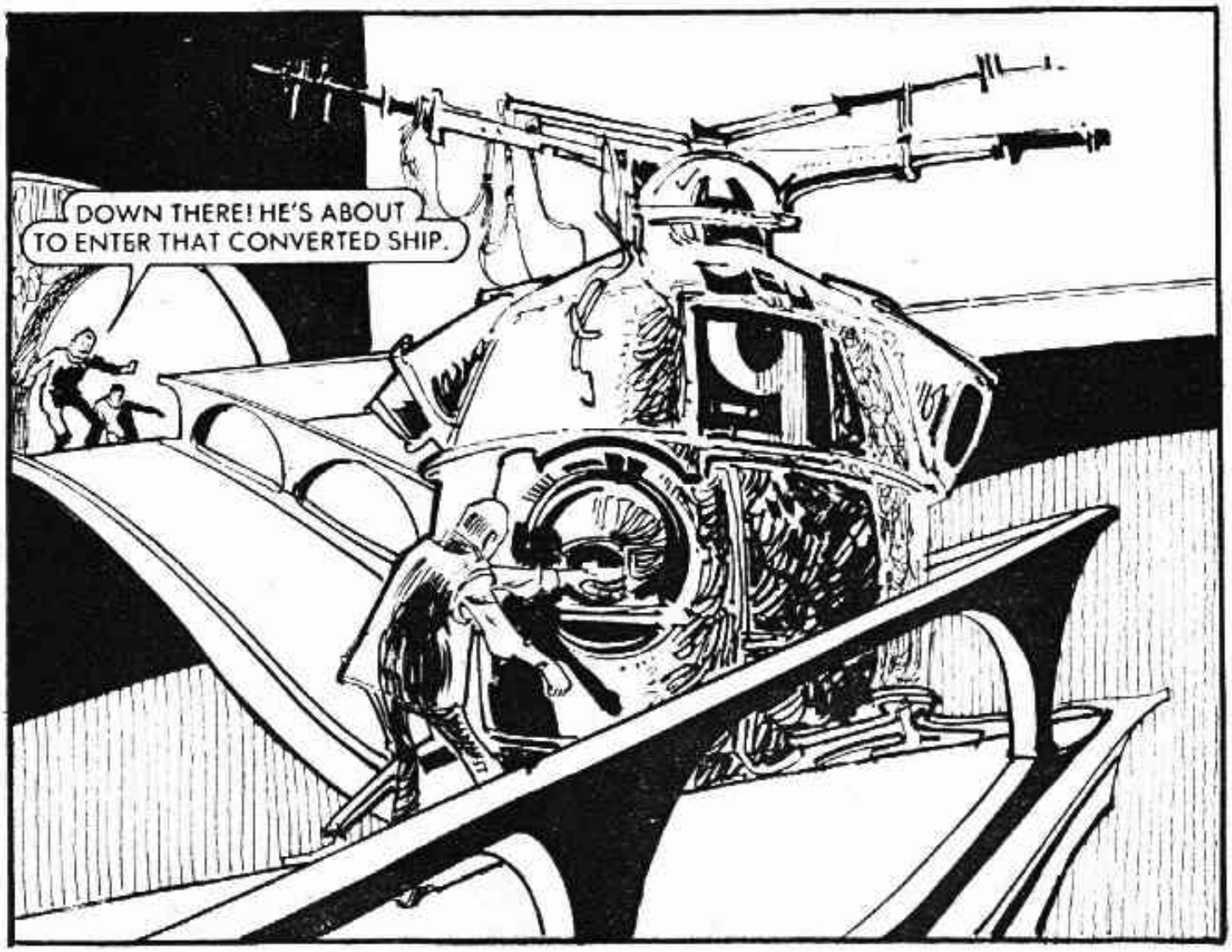
THE TELE-SPOTTER WAS DESIGNED FOR SEEKING OUT MINERALS AMONG THE ASTEROIDS, SO THIS SHOULDN'T BE TOO DIFFICULT.
LET'S CONCENTRATE ON THE LANDING PADS FIRST . . . SEE IF WE CAN LOCATE HIS SHIP.

WAIT! THERE HE IS!

I'D RECOGNISE THAT CRAFT ANYWHERE.
OKAY, LET'S GET DOWN THERE. THIS IS GOING TO BE THE FASTEST TOUCHDOWN ON RECORD.

THE MINING CRAFT TOUCHED DOWN —
THIS PLACE HAS ITS OWN ARTIFICIAL ATMOSPHERE AND GRAVFIELD, SO THERE'S NO NEED TO SUIT UP.
JUST AS WELL, TOO. WE'VE NO TIME TO LOSE.


THIS WAY! THE SPOTTER IS STILL HOMING IN ON HIM, SO WE CAN EASILY PINPOINT HIS POSITION.


DOWN THERE! HE'S ABOUT TO ENTER THAT CONVERTED SHIP.

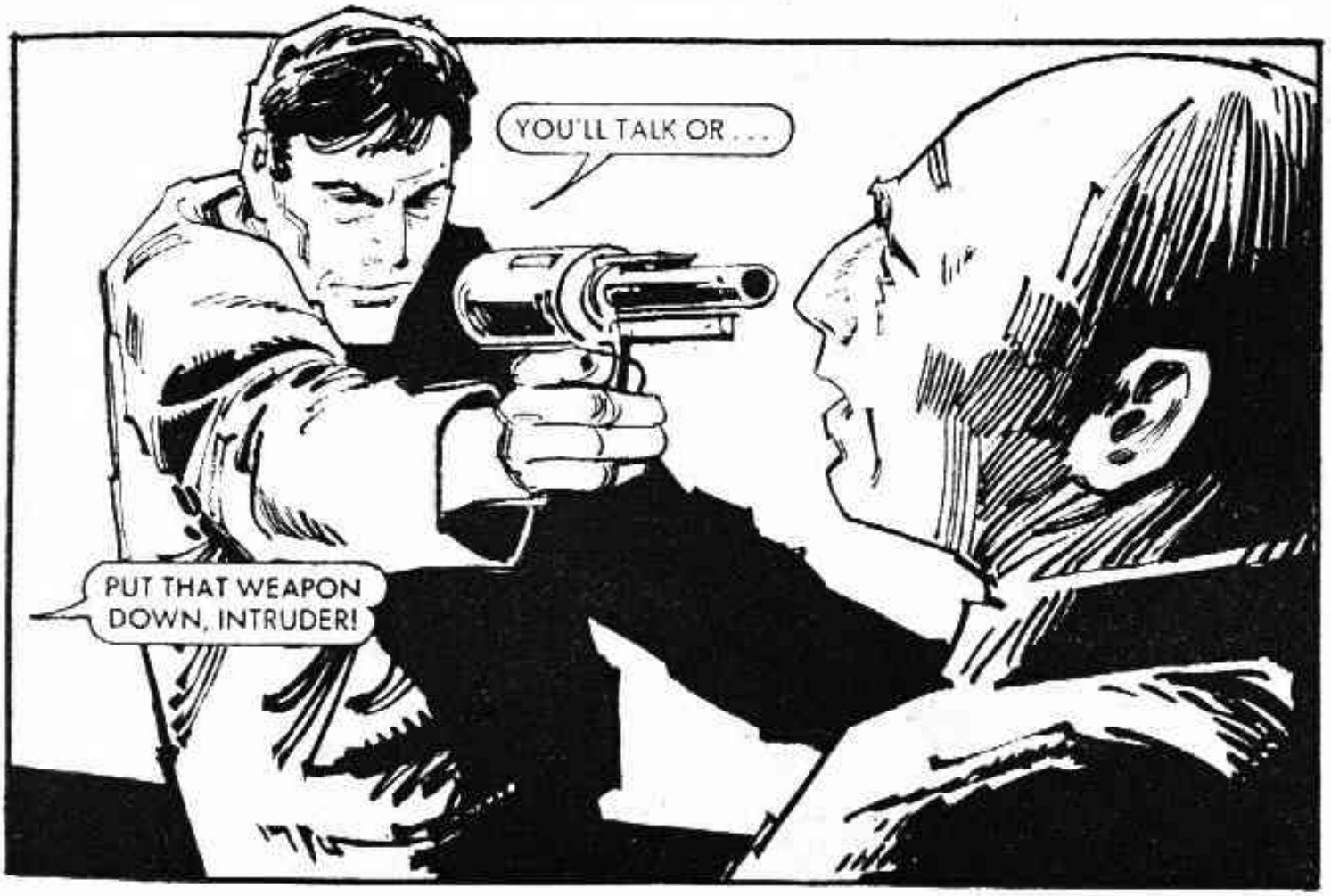
LOOK OUT!

NATHAN CLIMBED ROUND BEHIND THE ASSASSIN—
THIS MOLECULAR DISRUPTOR WILL END YOUR INTERFERENCE!
HE HASN'T SEEN ME LAND ON THIS WALKWAY. NOW IF I CAN JUST SNEAK UP ON HIM . . .

NATHAN'S JUMP WAS JUST IN TIME.

GOT HIM!

NOW I WANT SOME ANSWERS FROM OUR FRIEND HERE.
YOU'LL LEARN NOTHING FROM ME.

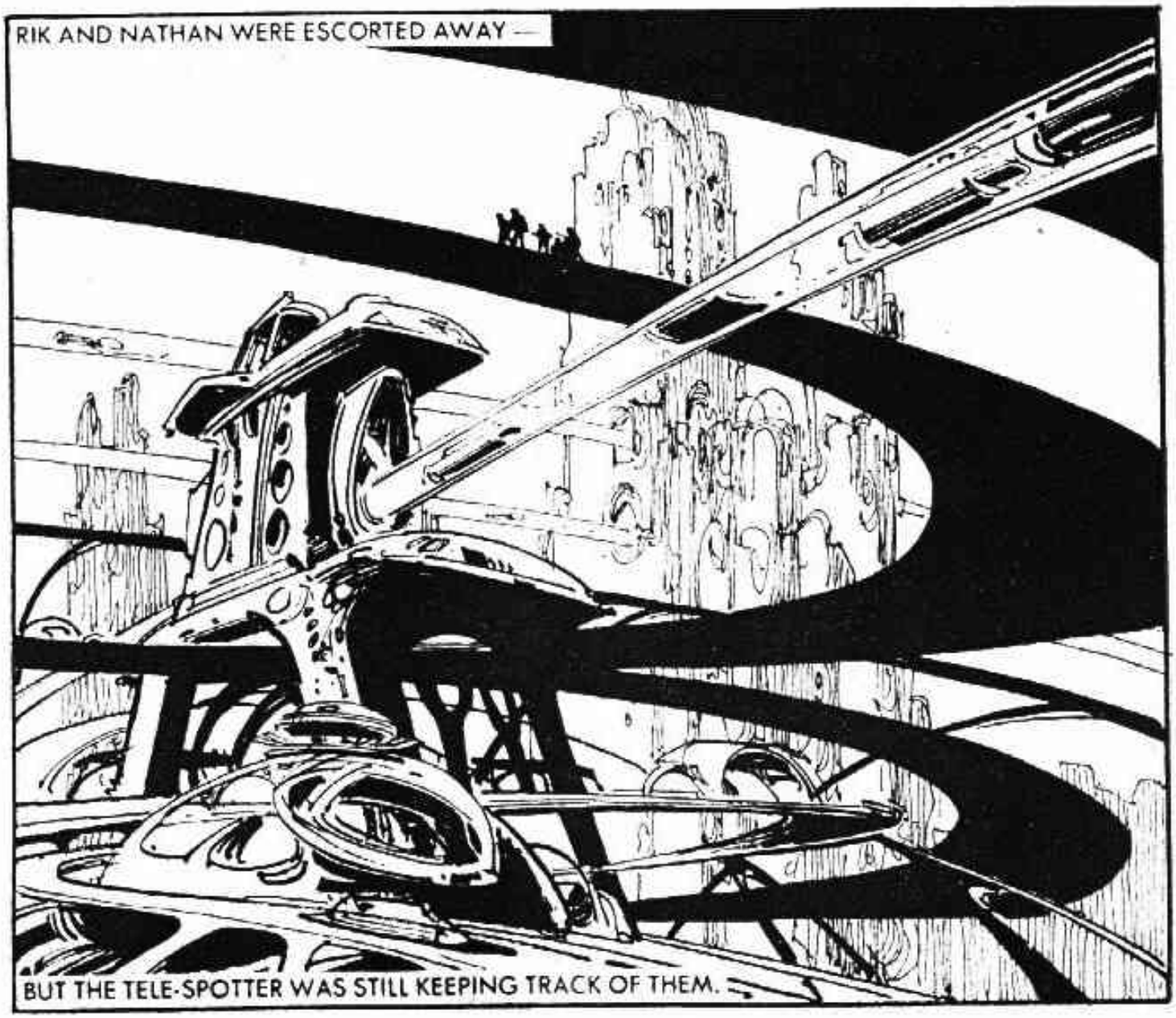

YOU'LL TALK OR . . .
PUT THAT WEAPON DOWN, INTRUDER!

THREE TIN CITY PATROLMEN HAD ARRIVED—
WHA — ?
WHO ARE YOU?
VISITORS! WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY FROM HERE . . .

WHILE NATHAN WAS DISTRACTED HIS CAPTIVE MADE HIS MOVE.
HE'S GETTING AWAY! STOP HIM!

HE'S VANISHING!

IT'S A TELEPORTATION BOOTH.
HOLD IT THERE, YOU TWO! THE ONLY PLACE YOU'RE GOING IS TO SEE OUR LEADER, TARRANT!


RIK AND NATHAN WERE ESCORTED AWAY —
BUT THE TELE-SPOTTER WAS STILL KEEPING TRACK OF THEM.

THE TELE-SPOTTER RELAYED THE SCENE BACK TO THE SHIP.
I MUST NOT REMAIN IDLE WHILE MY MASTER IS IN DANGER.
BY THE STARWINDS! LOOK WHAT'S COMING THIS WAY!
ROBOTS ARE FORBIDDEN IN TIN CITY. BLAST IT.

IT'S NO USE! WE'LL HAVE TO CALL CENTRAL . . .

SEND FOR A PATROL SQUAD. THEY'LL HANDLE IT.

WITH ITS ONE FUNCTIONING ARM, THE ROBOT DIRECTED A MODULATED SONIC BLAST AT ITS ATTACKERS.

MEANWHILE, RIK AND NATHAN HAD BEEN BROUGHT BEFORE TARRANT, THE RULER OF TIN CITY.
TARRANT, YOU HAVE AN UNAUTHORISED TELE-BOOTH IN THIS JUNKYARD CITY OF YOURS. I WANT TO KNOW WHAT CO-ORDINATES IT IS SET FOR . . .
I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA. I'M BEING PAID 1,000 ZRILLUM CRYSTALS PER CYCLE FOR ITS UPKEEP—AND FOR THAT KIND OF MONEY I DON'T ASK QUESTIONS.
WELL, YOU'D BETTER BE READY TO START ANSWERING A FEW WHEN EARTH SECURITY STARTS CRAWLING AROUND HERE.

SUDDENLY, THE GIGANTIC ROBOT SMASHED THROUGH THE WALL—
KRASH!
AH! MY MINING ROBOT . . . IT IS RATHER A HANDY BODYGUARD.
I'LL TAKE A BLASTER. I MAY NEED IT WHEREVER THAT TELE-BOOTH TAKES ME . . .
YOU'RE NOT THINKING OF GOING ALONE?

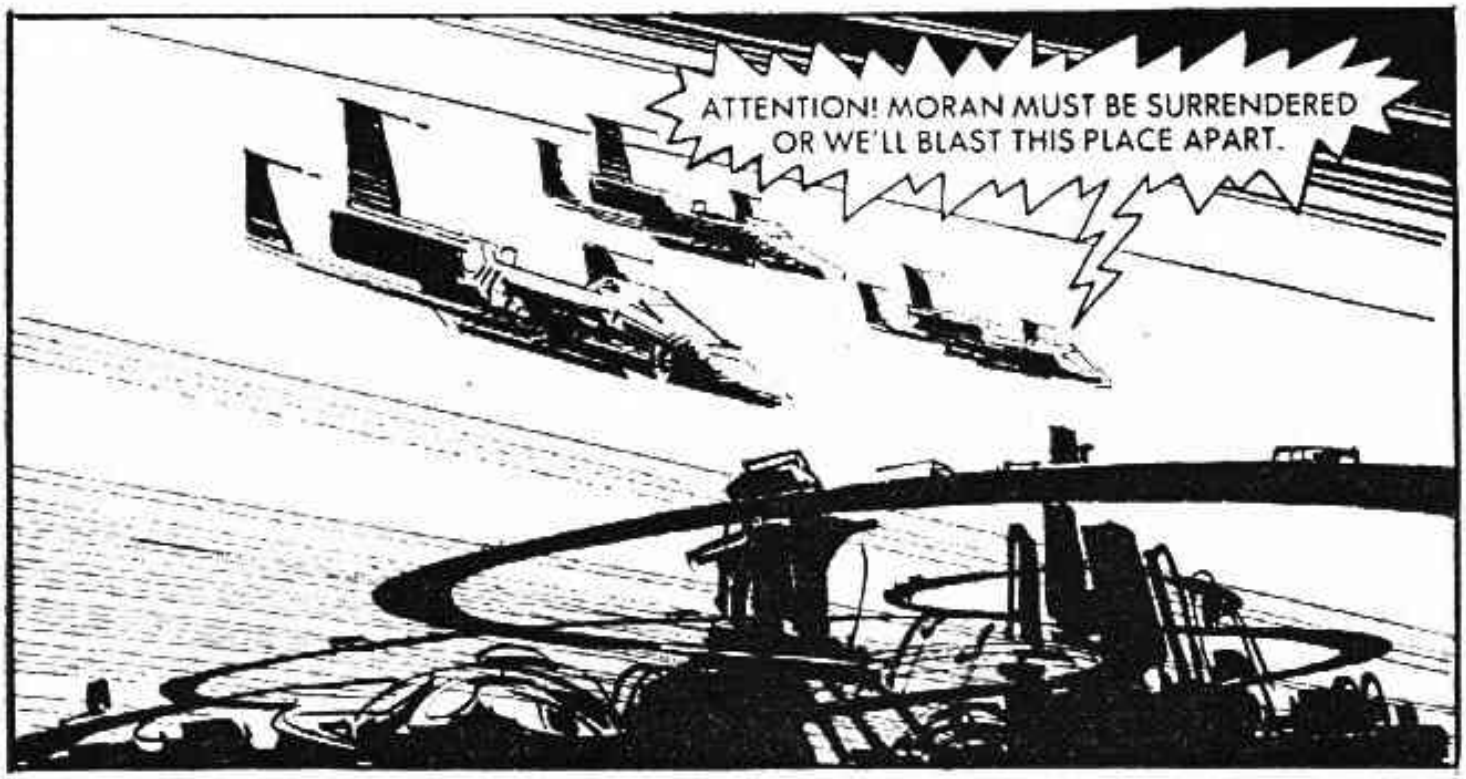
I HAVE TO! I'LL TAKE THE SPOTTER ALONG AND YOU CAN MONITOR ME FROM HERE . . .
RIK WAS INSTANTLY TRANSPORTED ACROSS SPACE.
I SEEM TO BE ON BOARD A DEEP SPACE SHIP.

A GIANT SCREEN CRACKLED INTO LIFE—
IT'S A VAKLAR WAR COMMANDER!
YOU HAVE PERFORMED YOUR MISSIONS WELL, MY AGENTS.
YOUR CAREFULLY PLANNED ACTS OF ASSASSINATION HAVE CRIPPLED VITAL INDUSTRIES THROUGHOUT THE EARTH QUADRANT. THE TIME IS RIPE FOR THE VAKLAR EMPIRE TO STRIKE!

A RAY OF ENERGY TRANSFORMED THE VAKLARS' EARTH FEATURES BACK TO THEIR REAL APPEARANCE—

THE MATTER TRANSFORMER HAD NO EFFECT ON RIK.
THIS IS ONE JAM I WON'T BE ABLE TO TALK MY WAY OUT OF . . .
MEANWHILE, BACK IN TIN CITY, NATHAN HAD BEEN OBSERVING ALL THAT WENT ON VIA TARRANT'S WALL SCREEN.
I—I HAD NO IDEA . . .
THIS IS FAR MORE THAN ANY OF US IMAGINED. NOTIFY EARTH SECURITY—I'M GOING TO TRY AND HELP RIK.

WITHIN MOMENTS . . .
IT'S AN EARTH SECURITY PATROL. THEY CAN'T HAVE GOT HERE ALREADY IN RESPONSE TO TARRANT'S CALL.


ATTENTION! MORAN MUST BE SURRENDERED OR WE'LL BLAST THIS PLACE APART.

TARRANT MUST HAVE GRANTED THEM LANDING PERMISSION. I'LL LET THEM PUT THEM IN THE PICTURE . . .

. . . I HAVEN'T TIME FOR EXPLANATIONS!

YOU THERE! HALT!
THAT'S IT . . . KEEP BETWEEN US. YOUR SKIN'S TOUGHER THAN MINE!

MOMENTS LATER, NATHAN PLUNGED THROUGH THE TIME TRANSPORTER—
MADE IT! I ONLY HOPE TARRANT GETS THE CHANCE TO TALK SENSE TO THEM BEFORE THEY START COMING AFTER ME . . .

DON'T MOVE, EARTHMAN.

WHA—?
OKAY, THIS MAY SOUND CORNY . . . BUT TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER!

MEANWHILE, IN THE SHIP'S CONTROL ROOM . . .
YOU'VE BEEN BROUGHT HERE IN STASIS, EARTHLING, SO YOU CAN WITNESS THE FINAL DEFEAT OF YOUR RACE.

WE ARE NOW APPROACHING THE OUTER FRINGE OF YOUR QUADRANT. THE TELEPORTATION BOOTH YOU CAME THOUGH IS MERELY A SMALL VERSION OF THE REAL THING. THESE CAN TRANSPORT ENTIRE WARFLEETS IN AN INSTANT. EARTH SHALL SOON BE OURS.

AT EARTH'S OUTPOST Z19, THE DAY-TO-DAY ROUTINE WAS ABOUT TO BE SHATTERED AS THE TELEPORTATION BEGAN—
SHIPS APPROACHING! IT—IT LOOKS LIKE A BATTLE FLEET!

BATTLE STATIONS WERE SOUNDED . . .
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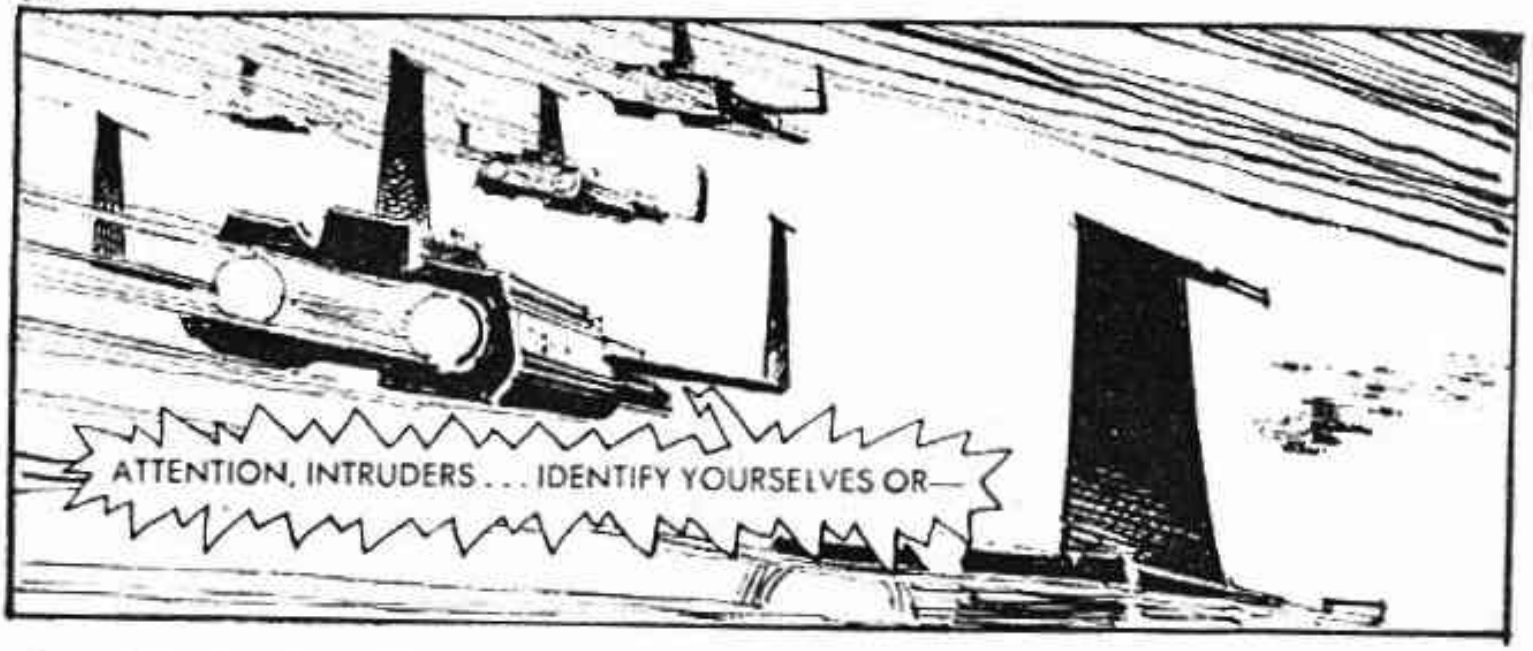
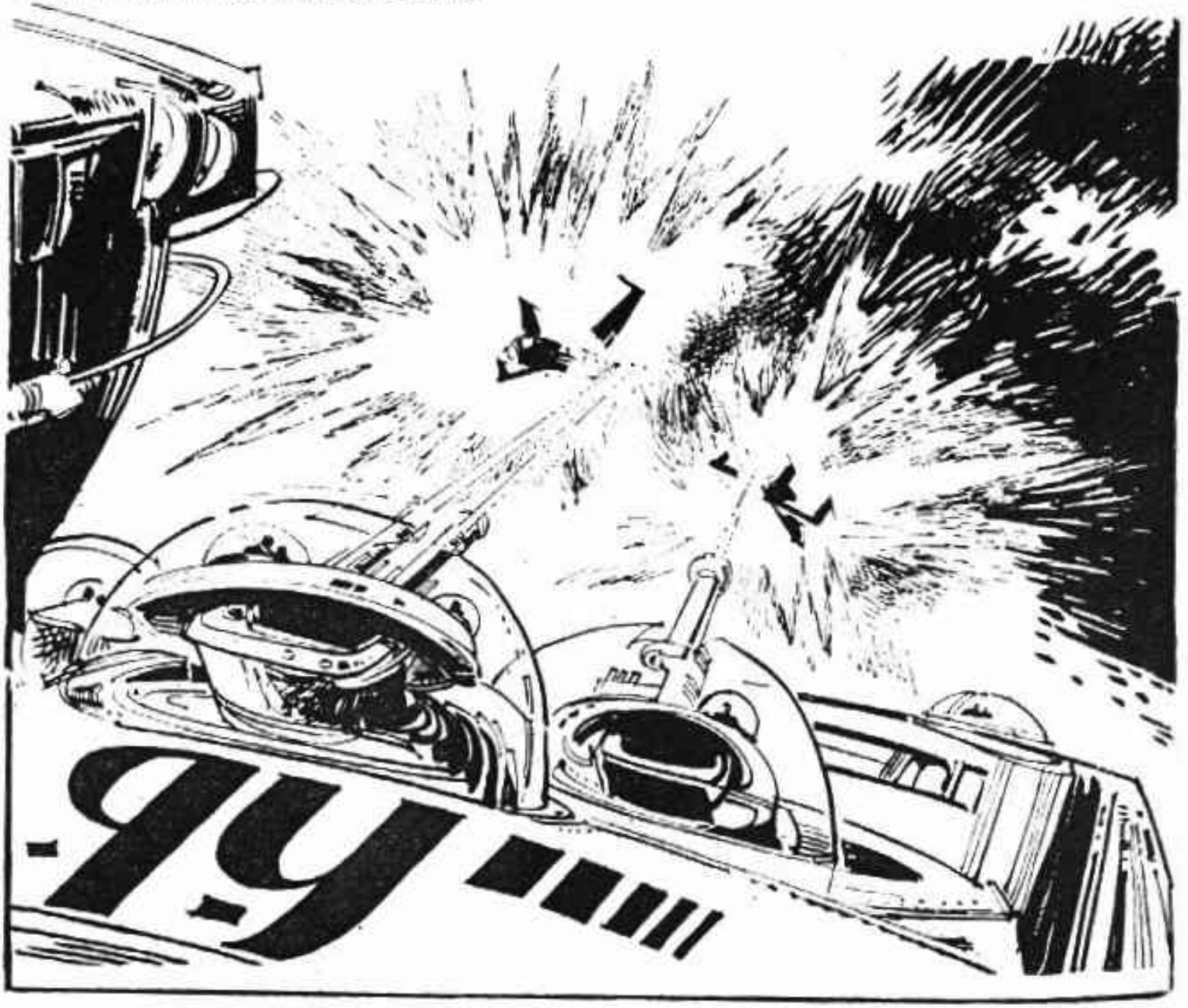
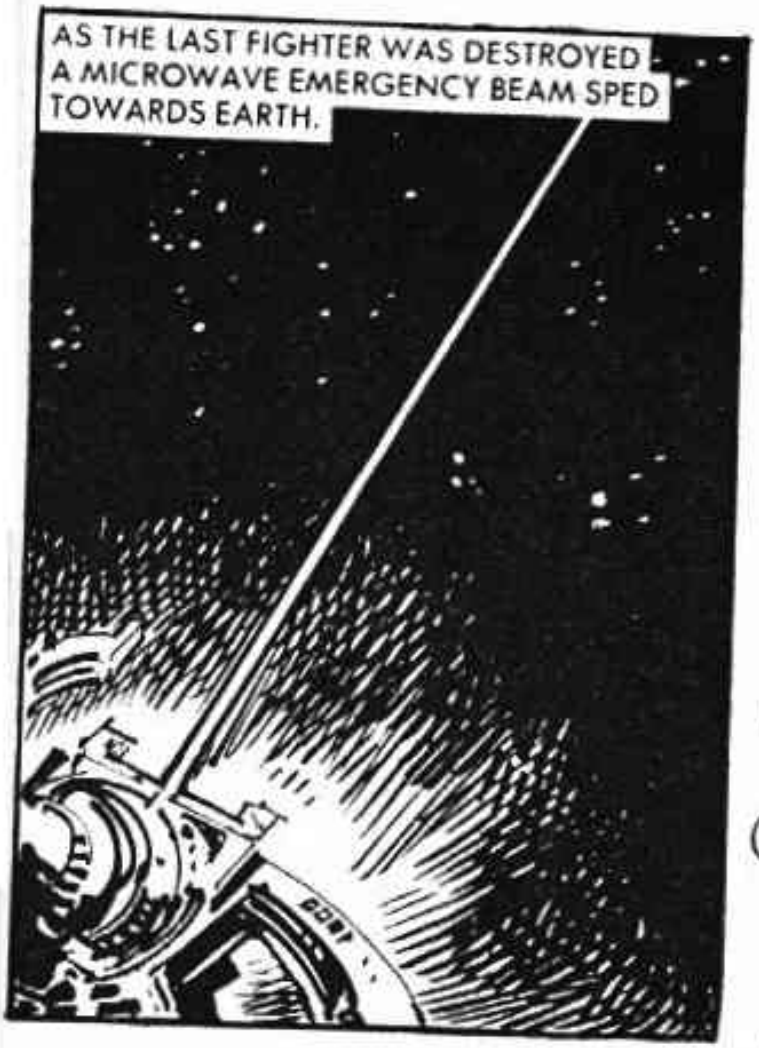
ALL PILOTS TO THEIR SHIPS! IMMEDIATE LAUNCH!
INVESTIGATE INTRUDERS!



BUT THE REPLY WAS A HAIL OF DEATH.



OUR SQUADRON'S HAD IT. LET'S HOPE EARTH DEENCE RECEIVES OUR MESSAGE IN TIME . . .


AS THE LAST FIGHTER WAS DESTROYED A MICROWAVE EMERGENCY BEAM SPED TOWARDS EARTH.

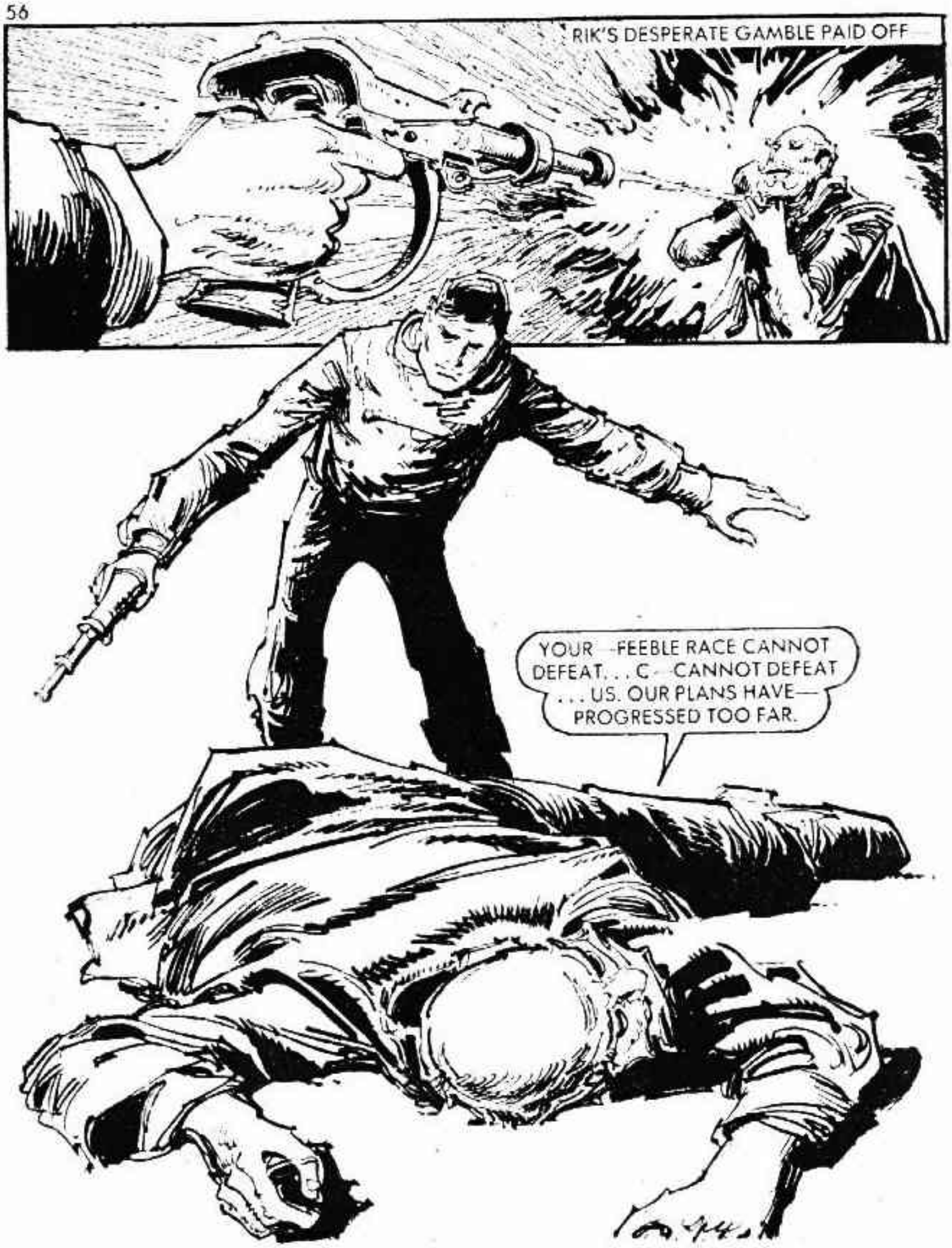
ON THE VAKLAR BATTLESHIP . . .
OUR CONQUEST HAS BEGUN, EARTHMAN. NOTHING CAN STOP US NOW!

I WOULDN'T BET ON THAT, VAKLAR!
LAY DOWN YOUR PHASER, EARTHMAN, OR I SHALL BE FORCED TO DESTROY YOUR FRIEND!

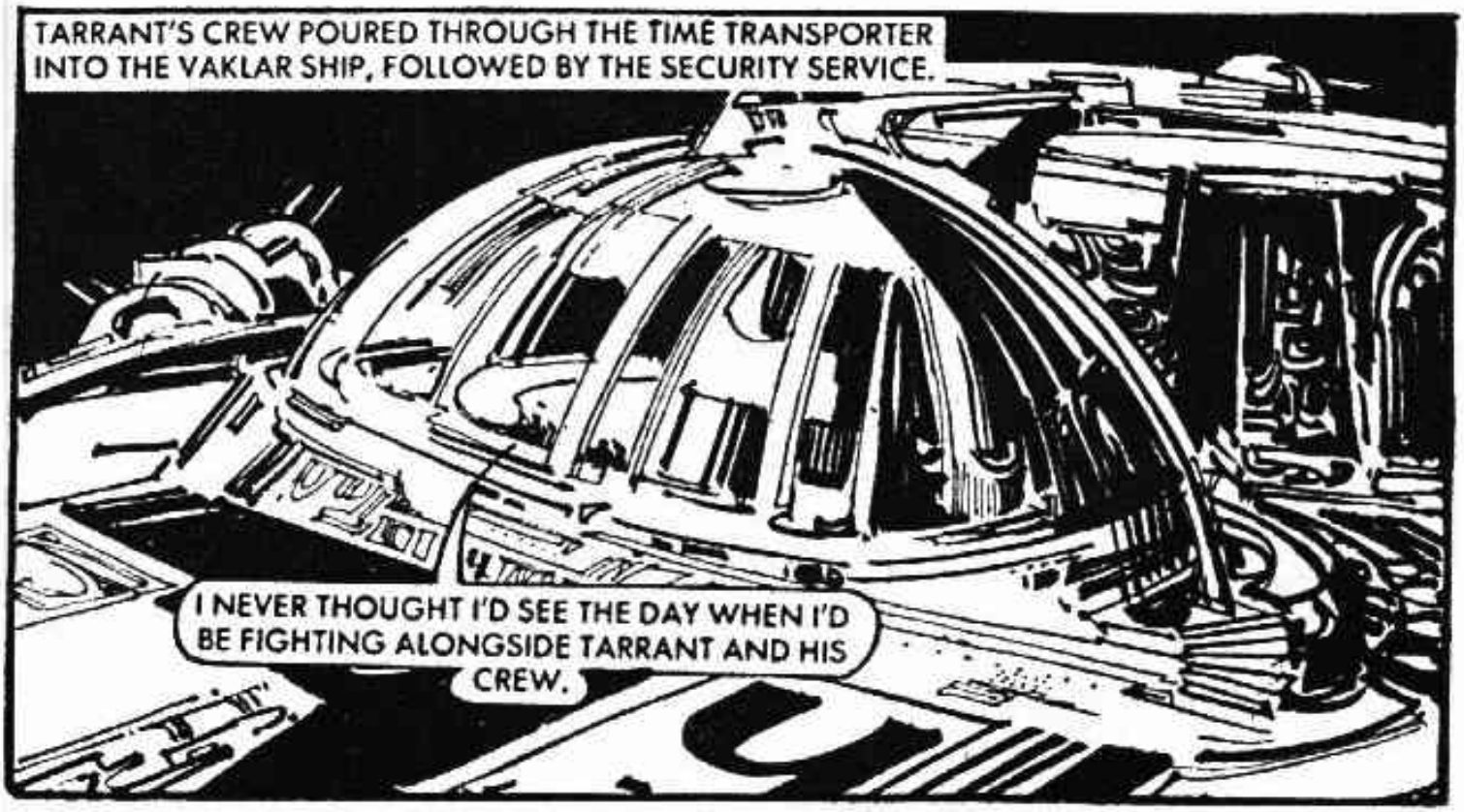
NATHAN FIRED—
YOU'LL HAVE TO CATCH HIM FIRST, VAKLAR!
DIE!
—AND RIK THREW HIMSELF ASIDE.

AAAH!
THE ROBOT DEALT WITH VAKLAR—
WELL DONE!
BLAAM!

NO YOU DON'T!
YOU SHALL NOT ESCAPE!
RIK MANAGED TO EVADE THE VAKLAR'S SHOT—
IF I CAN JUST REACH THAT WEAPON IN TIME . . .


RIK'S DESPERATE GAMBLE PAID OFF
YOUR --FEEBLE RACE CANNOT DEFEAT. . . C--CANNOT DEFEAT . . . US. OUR PLANS HAVE— PROGRESSED TOO FAR.

HE'S RIGHT! WE HAVE THIS SHIP, BUT THERE'S NO WAY THE TWO OF US COULD HANDLE IT ALONE.
MAYBE WE WON'T HAVE TO. IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN, IT SOUNDS LIKE WE WON'T BE ALONE MUCH LONGER...


TARRANT'S CREW POURED THROUGH THE TIME TRANSPORTER INTO THE VAKLAR SHIP, FOLLOWED BY THE SECURITY SERVICE.
I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE THE DAY WHEN I'D BE FIGHTING ALONGSIDE TARRANT AND HIS CREW.

ELSEWHERE, OUTPOST Z19'S TRANSMISSION HAD BEEN INTERCEPTED AND EARTH'S DEPLETED DEFENCE SQUADRONS WERE GOING INTO ACTION.
I DON'T RECKON MUCH OF OUR CHANCES THIS TIME. WE SUFFERED HEAVY LOSSES DURING THE WAR AND HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO BUILD REPLACEMENTS YET.

THERE'S BEEN SO MUCH SABOTAGE AT OUR FACTORIES LATELY THAT PRODUCTION HAS GROUND TO A HALT. SOMEHOW THE VAKLARS MUST HAVE BEEN BEHIND IT ALL ALONG.

MEANWHILE, UNDER RIK'S SUPERVISION, THE EARTH PEOPLE HAD BEEN FAMILIARISING THEMSELVES WITH THE ALIEN VESSEL.
OKAY—WE'VE LEARNED AS MUCH AS WE'RE LIKELY TO. LET'S MOVE OUT!
SLOWLY THE GREAT SHIP RESPONDED TO THE CONTROLS.
KEEP FIRING, MEN! THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT'S HIT THEM!
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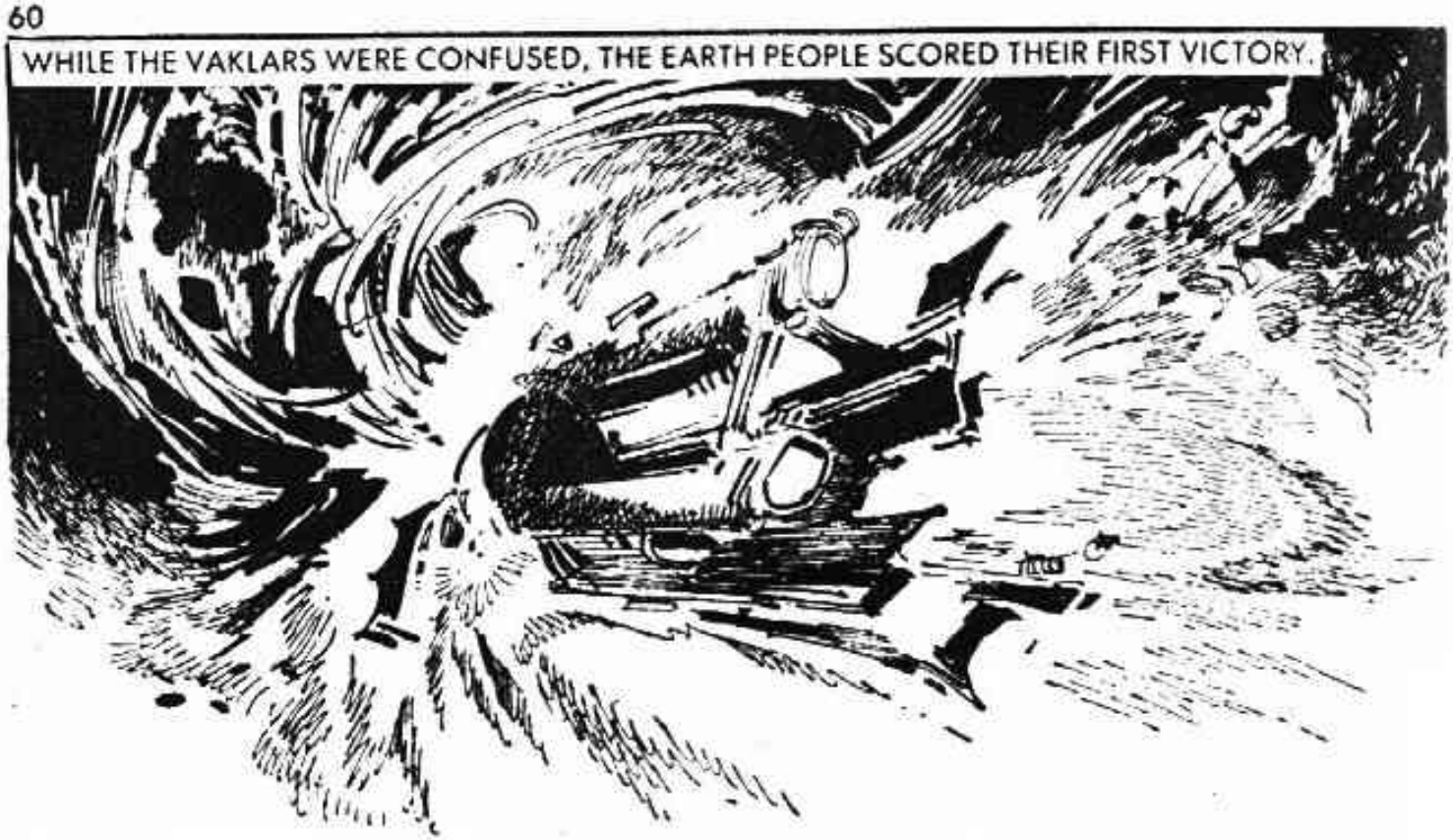
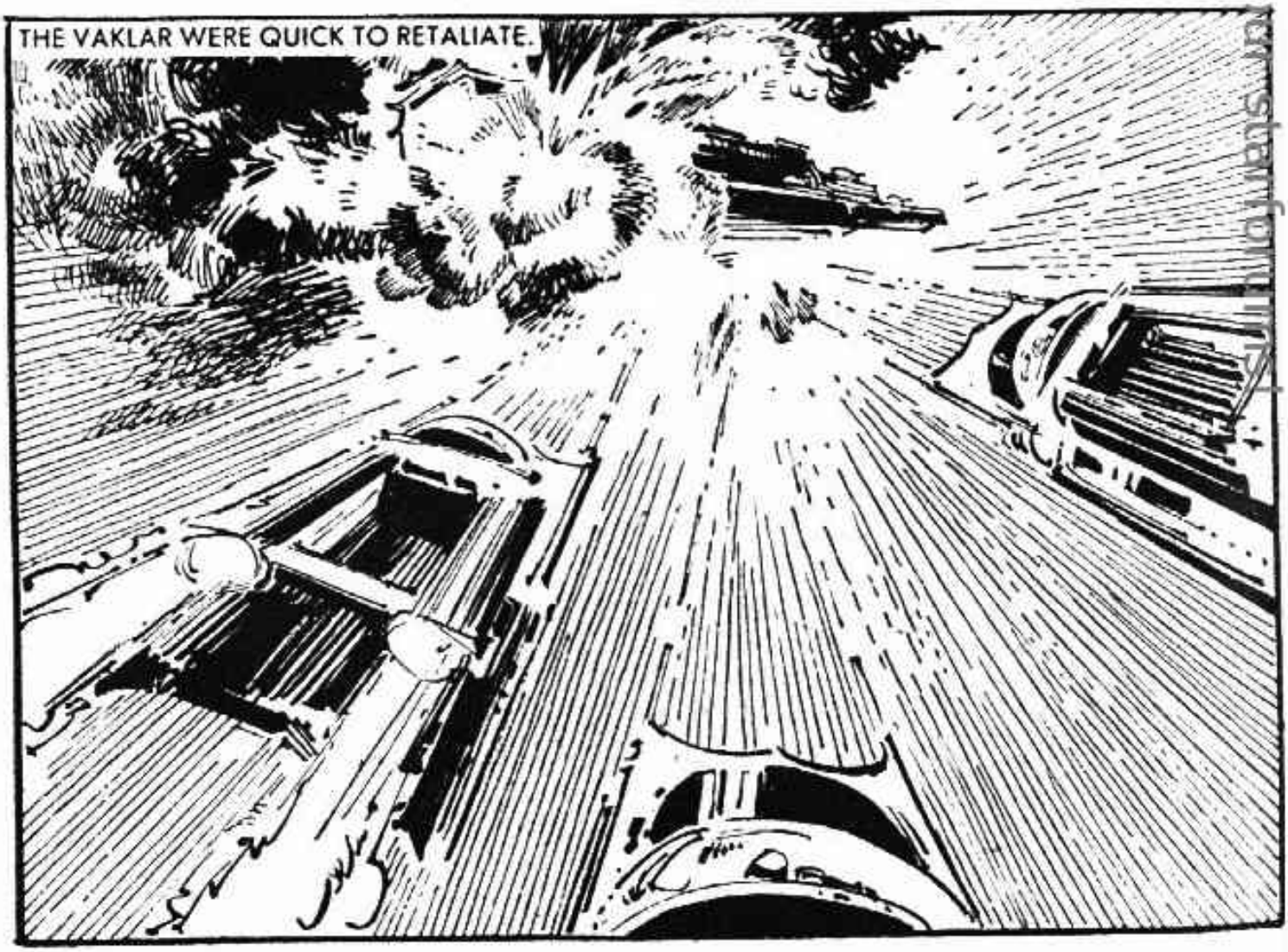




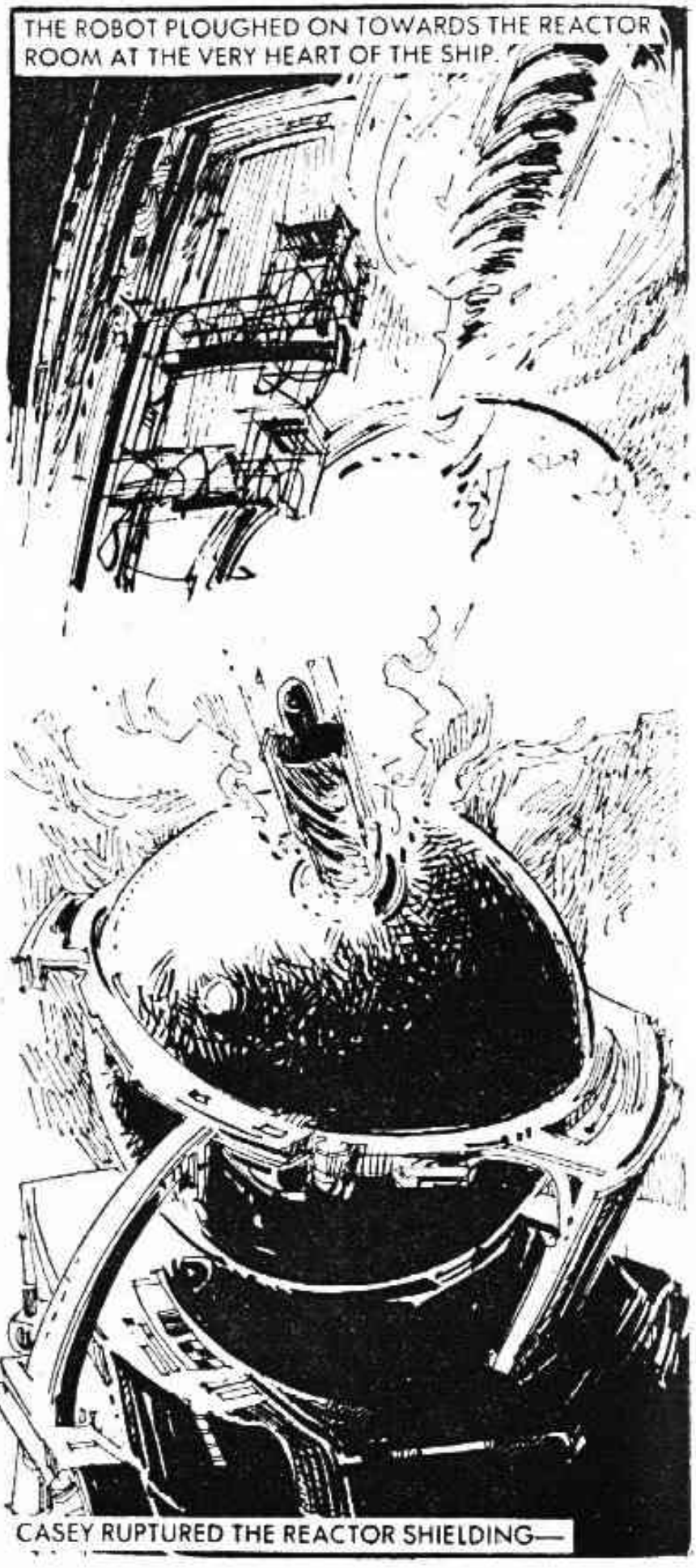
Transcribed by Jack Stanford

WE'VE BEET HIT! THE REAR STABILISERS ARE OUT!
WE WEREN'T HAVING MUCH SUCCESS STEERING THIS CRATE, ANYWAY!
OUT OF CONTROL, THE FLAGSHIP PLUMMETED THROUGH THE DISORGANISED BATTLE FLEET.
MORE DAMAGE REPORTS COMING IN, RIK. WE'RE TOO UNFAMILIAR WITH THIS EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EFFECTIVE BATTLE STATUS.

A SUDDEN EXPLOSION ROCKED THE SHIP.
THIS VESSEL SEEMS BETTER PROTECTED THAN THE OTHERS, BUT WE CAN'T TAKE MUCH MORE OF THIS BOMBARDMENT.
MAYBE WE WON'T HAVE TO! I'VE JUST HAD AN IDEA!

I'LL BE SORRY TO SEE YOU GO, BUT IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO DO YOUR STUFF . . .
OKAY, EVERYBODY! WE'VE GOT ABOUT TWO MINUTES TO GET OFF THIS HULK!
MEGATON MINING ROBOTS WERE DESIGNED FOR BURROWING THROUGH EVEN THE DENSEST OF ASTEROIDS . . .

. . . SO THE SYNTHETIC PLASTISTEEL OF THE SHIP'S INNARDS WAS NO OBSTACLE AT ALL.


THE ROBOT PLOUGHED ON TOWARDS THE REACTOR ROOM AT THE VERY HEART OF THE SHIP.
CASEY RUPTURED THE REACTOR SHIELDING—

THERE WAS A COLOSSAL SOUNDLESS EXPLOSION IN THE ETERNAL SILENCE OF SPACE. THE VAKLAR INVASION FLEET AND ANYTHING ELSE WITHIN A RADIUS OF SEVERAL PARSECS WAS INSTANTLY AND TOTALLY ANNIHILATED.

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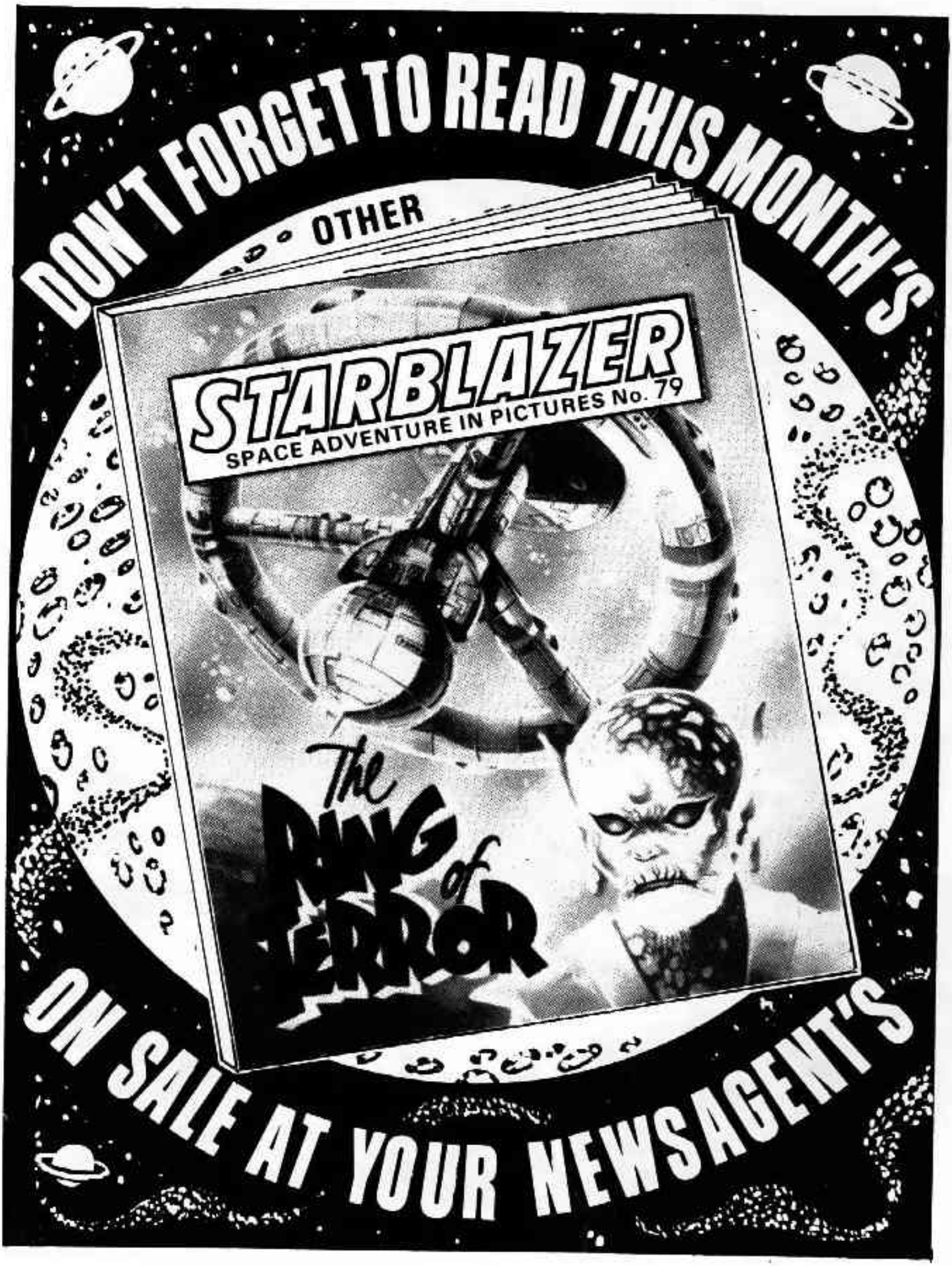
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The constellation of Virgo lies on the celestial equator and covers a vast area of sky. By far the brightest, and best known stars, are Spica and Porrima.